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# **CULTURAL CONVERSATIONS IN A COUNSELLING CONTEXT**

**A thesis  
submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree  
of  
Master of Counselling  
at  
University of Waikato  
by  
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## **Abstract**

This research project focuses on counselling practice with Maori women who have engaged in counselling in relation to overcoming the effects of both historic and recent sexual abuse. The researcher / counsellor is pakeha.

The counsellor / researcher, researches her practice and its possible effects through research interviews with three women. The project offers a reflection on her practice ethics and on what she learns from the women. In particular, she explores the intentions and effects of an orientation to counselling that includes offering and taking up conversations about aspects of cultural identity. She explores the effect of the counselling conversations where aspects of ethno-cultural identity have been included on the women's sense of identity. She explores what she draws on as a Pakeha counsellor when offering and taking up conversations about aspects of cultural identity. She also explores the effects of offering and taking up conversations about aspects of cultural identity for the work of counselling.

The project shows the researcher's responses to the research meetings and the learning she takes to her ongoing counselling practice.

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<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Acknowledgements.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Chapter one: An orientation to this research project.....</b>	<b>9</b>
An overview of the project.....	9
The structure of this thesis .....	10
My interest in this research .....	11
Introduction .....	11
Recent history.....	11
Opportunities my work has provided.....	12
Ethical responsibility.....	14
Early influences in the research .....	16
Remembering a ballet performance – first example .....	16
Recalling school reading – second example .....	16
The effects of these examples .....	17
School values .....	18
The rationale for this research.....	19
Why do I accept referrals from Maori women? .....	20
This research asks three questions: .....	22
A note about terminology: client, conversation and culture .....	23
Culture.....	23
Conversation .....	23
Client.....	24
Theoretical concepts that inform my counselling practice and this research.....	24
Social constructionism .....	24
Knowledge .....	25
Language .....	26
Power .....	26
Discourse.....	27
Positioning .....	28
Identity .....	29
The particularities of my narrative counselling practice.....	30
Appreciating small details.....	30
Externalising conversations .....	31
Exploring the effects of the abuse.....	31
Unique moments .....	32
Social and political contexts .....	33
Not knowing I do not know .....	34
A way to proceed .....	34
Tentative enquiry .....	35
Feminist thought .....	36
Autoethnography.....	37
A brief summary of my position .....	37
<b>Chapter two: Literature review .....</b>	<b>39</b>
Pakeha culture, Pakeha identity .....	40
Visibility and the dominant culture.....	40
Privilege .....	41
Privilege and professional practice .....	42



The letter – a witnessing response .....	75
Acknowledgement.....	77
Concerns about chronology.....	77
A contextual note .....	79
Introduction to chapters four, five and six .....	79
<b>Chapter four: Huia .....</b>	<b>80</b>
Introduction .....	80
The effects of colonisation – historical and current .....	80
Experiences of dissonance in school and education .....	84
Another explanation of educational dissonance.....	86
How it is possible to speak about injustices.....	87
An outsider witness response .....	89
Holding hope .....	91
A newspaper article – news of difference .....	91
A counselling practice.....	96
Chapter summary .....	99
<b>Chapter five: Mihi.....</b>	<b>101</b>
The context of our meeting .....	101
Witnessing the conversation with Mihi.....	101
The letter .....	102
Further to the letter and back to the transcript .....	108
Culture Shock – an introduction to discourse .....	108
The effect of universality .....	109
Seeing my interest .....	110
Implications for counselling.....	111
Caring to ‘regard’ cultural identity .....	113
Effects of disregard .....	115
Unique moments .....	116
A leap of faith to a space of mutual learning .....	118
<b>Chapter six: Nikki.....</b>	<b>122</b>
Introduction .....	122
An initial reflection .....	122
An understanding of cultural identity .....	123
The tangi – a sense of timing .....	124
To the reader – a careful practice .....	127
Witnessing the effects of racism .....	128
Further effects of witnessing racism .....	130
A witnessing response.....	131
An invitation to act.....	132
The reciprocity of the meeting .....	132
Nikki’s response to an inquiry of cultural identity.....	135
What made the conversation possible.....	136
<b>Chapter seven: A discussion.....</b>	<b>138</b>
How my practice has been shaped by this research .....	138
Introduction .....	138
The conclusion of the research.....	138
Echoes between the women’s stories.....	139

The significance of whakapapa.....	139
The social and political context.....	140
The effects of racism - the operation of privilege .....	141
The experience of universality .....	142
A particular kind of listening – compassionate witnessing.....	143
The understandings I have gained in light of the research questions.....	144
Appreciating the connection between local experience and the effects of colonisation .....	144
Making connections .....	145
Attunement to listening in particular ways .....	146
Reciprocity and taking it back practices .....	147
The effects of dominant discursive cultural practices.....	148
Creating the conditions for cultural identity conversations .....	149
Re-presentation .....	150
<b>References .....</b>	<b>152</b>
<b>Appendix A .....</b>	<b>160</b>
Letter of invitation to Huia.....	160
<b>Appendix B .....</b>	<b>162</b>
Letter of invitation to Mihi.....	162
<b>Appendix C .....</b>	<b>163</b>
Letter of invitation to Nikki .....	163
<b>Appendix D .....</b>	<b>164</b>
Information sheet about research project for Huia.....	164
Title: Cultural conversations in a counselling context.....	164
My area of interest .....	164
How the research will happen: .....	164
Recording meetings.....	165
The First Meeting.....	165
The Second Meeting .....	165
Your rights in the project .....	165
Confidentiality .....	166
Where the information we talk about together, will go .....	166
Deciding not to participate .....	166
What to do next.....	167
<b>Appendix E .....</b>	<b>168</b>
Information sheet about research project for Mihi.....	168
Title: Cultural conversations in a counselling context.....	168
My area of interest .....	168
How the research will happen .....	168
Recording meetings.....	169
The First Meeting.....	169
The Second Meeting .....	169
Your rights in the project .....	169
Confidentiality .....	170
Where the information we talk about together will go .....	170
Deciding not to participate .....	170
What to do next .....	171



<b>Appendix F.....</b>	<b>172</b>
Information sheet about research project for Nikki .....	172
Title: Cultural conversations in a counselling context.....	172
My area of interest .....	172
How the research will happen .....	172
Recording Meetings .....	172
The First Meeting.....	173
The Second Meeting .....	173
Your rights in the project .....	173
Confidentiality .....	173
Where the information we talk about together will go .....	174
Deciding not to participate .....	174
What to do next .....	174
<b>Appendix G.....</b>	<b>176</b>
Expressions of interest in research project.....	176
Title: Cultural conversations in a counselling context.....	176
<b>Appendix H.....</b>	<b>177</b>
Consent form.....	177
Title: Cultural conversations in a counselling context.....	177
<b>Appendix I .....</b>	<b>179</b>
Withdrawal form .....	179
Title: Cultural conversations in a counselling context.....	179

# **Chapter one: An orientation to this research project**

## ***An overview of the project***

This research is an exploration of my counselling practice as a pakeha counsellor with three Maori women, Huia, Mihi and Nikki. In particular, it is an investigation into the ways in which the counselling conversations have attended to aspects of each woman's identity as a Maori woman. It explores the qualities of the counselling relationship, between the women and me that have contributed to such counselling conversations taking place, and it investigates the significance of these conversations to the lives of the women participants and to me as researcher practitioner.

The project has taken place within the context of my work as a sole private practitioner. It is within this context that I first met Huia, Mihi and Nikki when they individually consulted me for counselling in regard to overcoming the effects of sexual abuse. These counselling relationships have continued with each of the women at the same time as we also forged a research relationship as researcher and participant.

The project presents an account of each woman's experience of the times in counselling, where cultural identity conversations have been included. In presenting each account I acknowledge the contributions Huia, Mihi and Nikki have made to my professional life and to the ongoing work with other women I meet in counselling. These accounts also acknowledge the significance of the conversations to my interest in and commitment to an ethical counselling practice and tell of the effects these conversations have contributed to my identity as a pakeha counsellor.

The research conversations are located within the theoretical concepts of social constructionism and the ideas and practices of narrative therapy. These ideas are ones that also inform my counselling practice. A significant feature of these ideas and of the position I take in this research is the absence of claims to a single explanation or a single 'truth': "What distinguishes a narrative approach to counselling ... is its

rejection of an essentialised understanding of the origins of human subjectivity” (Winslade, 2005). Thus, in terms of this project, I am not interested in pursuing or making claims that the way I have approached this research is the right way. Nor do I wish to claim that the understandings arising from the project are the truth of the matter for Pakeha counsellors working with Maori. This research project offers but one way of appreciating what might support a counselling relationship where the counsellor is Pakeha and the person seeking assistance is Maori.

In its focus on my own counselling practice this research is also partly informed by autoethnography (Holman Jones, 2005). The project, however, is not only autoethnographic for it involves representing the voices of the women who participated in the project alongside my own as practitioner researcher.

### ***The structure of this thesis***

Chapter One locates my interest and the theoretical ideas that have informed this research project. It introduces the history of my relationship to narrative ideas and to preferred ways of working with people who seek my help as a counsellor. It introduces the principles that guide my practice as a counsellor and now as a new and tentative practitioner researcher.

Chapter Two presents an overview of the literature which has influenced my counselling practice and the approach to this research. It offers a context for the counselling practice that is at the centre of this research.

Chapter Three provides an account of how I approached this research from its earliest stage to the representation in the final document.

Chapter Four presents Huia’s story of the times in counselling where we talked about aspects of cultural identity. It also offers my understandings of these conversations with Huia.

Chapter Five presents Mihi's story of the counselling conversations that attended to aspects of cultural identity. It also offers the understandings of these conversations we engaged in together.

Chapter Six presents Nikki's story. It offers an account of the significance of counselling conversations that included talking about cultural identity and my understandings of these conversations.

Chapter Seven is a discussion of the significance of this project to my professional life as a counsellor. In particular, it discusses the understandings I have reached regarding my work as a Pakeha counsellor with Maori women.

## ***My interest in this research***

### **Introduction**

This chapter introduces the experiences of my personal and professional life that have contributed to the shaping of this research project. It includes reviewing the recent history of my work with Maori women; introducing the reader to the contribution previous work environments have made to the position I take in my counselling practice; and a brief account of my introduction to narrative ideas. At this point I will not describe social constructionist concepts such as discourse and agency in anticipation of their description later in the chapter. I offer a discussion of some of the early influences on my life and the contribution these have made to the research project and to the understandings I hold about the world. The chapter includes an account of the theoretical ideas and practices of social constructionism that have informed and shaped my counselling and research practice, and it presents the particularities of my practice as a narrative counsellor.

### **Recent history**

Since 2004 I have noticed a steady increase in the number of Maori women referring themselves to me for counselling under the Accident Compensation Corporation

(ACC) scheme. This scheme, amongst other rehabilitation services, offers counselling assistance to adults, children and young people who have been subject to sexual abuse and who are experiencing mental health difficulties as a consequence of the abuse. Thus the women who referred themselves to me for counselling under this scheme were interested in overcoming the effects of the sexual abuse. The number of Maori women referring to my practice led me to speculate on the reasons for this increase. I considered whether the increase in numbers was connected to my availability for counselling; to not charging a surcharge for counselling; to the good fortune of answering the phone in person; or to being recommended by other agencies or women. I wondered too, if it was just coincidence. I discussed the developments in my work in supervision and reflected upon them further myself. I came to an understanding that the increasing number of Maori women consulting me was possibly connected, in part, to particular aspects of my counselling practice rather than an accidental occurrence. This was a thread I was interested to investigate further.

### **Opportunities my work has provided**

In reaching an appreciation that aspects of my counselling practice were contributing to Maori women seeking my assistance, I was drawing on two and a half decades of work as a counsellor and social worker. This work had been undertaken within various organisational settings, in both Aotearoa New Zealand and the United Kingdom. These experiences offered me the opportunity to work with people of different ethno-cultural identities in varying social and political contexts. The diversity of work these settings provided, have also offered me opportunities to review the ideas that have informed my practice.

It was through a review of the ideas informing my counselling and social work practice in the late 1980s that narrative approaches (Epston & White, 1989) became available to me as an alternative position from which to work. I was initially attracted to narrative ideas because they fitted with the kind of ethical approach I was interested in standing for in my practice. For example, I was interested in appreciating

the particularities of peoples' experiences of the problems rather than relying solely on medical or psychiatric descriptions of the problem. I was interested in standing alongside people rather than ahead of them in the exploration of the problems, knowing that together we might come to some alternative understandings of the difficulties. I was interested in investigating with people the effects the problems had in their lives. I was also interested in locating any difficulty within a wider social and political context of which narrative ideas seemed to offer. It was also at this point in my professional life that the weight of responsibility associated with occupying a position in which I was regularly invited to offer answers for people who sought assistance, was no longer tenable.

To this point the approaches to counselling and social work that I had engaged with were situated within theories that attributed the problem to the person and suggested that "the problem [w]as required ... by the persons or by the "system"" (Epston & White, 1989, p.14). While I did not actively seek to occupy such a position, there were many invitations by the organisations within which I worked, to take up these particular ways of working. It was clear too, the organisations themselves were also subject to the particular ideas and practices that privileged expert knowledge at the expense of "local knowledge" (White, 1997), that is the knowledge that people hold about their own lived experiences. The effect on my practice of working from a framework purporting to hold the truth about the nature of problems was dissatisfaction and discontent. I resisted many of the calls to expert status and continued to hold onto the values and ways of working, I preferred, ways such as fairness and justice.

As I stepped into the ideas offered by narrative practice, the possibility of a different kind of professional relationship with those who sought my assistance began to emerge. I began to imagine, for example, professional relationships where the taken for granted counselling practices I had been involved with might be made more transparent between the person seeking assistance and me. I began to imagine myself offering an explanation of the importance of taking notes, of their purpose, what I did

with them and how they ensured some professional accountability for my work. Narrative ideas and practices also held the possibility that I might have a different kind of appreciation of my professional identity, one that was different from the identity of struggling expert practitioner. The kind of professional identity I imagined for myself was one where the practice of fairness and integrity which I valued in my work, would be seen and appreciated by colleagues, experienced by the people who consulted me, and demonstrated in my work.

Stepping aside from positions that privilege expert knowledge and stepping toward a narrative practice, is another of the threads that have led me to undertake this project.

### **Ethical responsibility**

A principle that is important to me and upon which this research is founded, is ethical responsibility. As a member of a dominant cultural group, I believe I hold a responsibility to speak about the ideas and practices which marginalize groups within our communities and our society. There are many invitations through the operation of dominant cultural discourses for counsellors to ignore, to minimise or to discount the effects of cultural marginalisation in the counselling contexts within which we work. As a counsellor, I do not intentionally overlook marginalizing ideas and practices, but I am certain that I unwittingly do at times. When engaged in counselling, the effects of not noticing or overlooking can be silencing for the person consulting me. It can render aspects of their identity invisible. By not attending to marginalising practices, I may also minimise the effects of the difficulties a woman brings with her to counselling.

In this research, I am particularly interested in the discourses that have had marginalizing effects for the cultural identity of the women who consult me. I am interested to appreciate how such discourses have operated to produce cultural marginalization. Equally, I am interested to pay attention to particular discursive practices I may engage with in counselling. For example, I am interested in how the idea that pakeha values are the norm might operate in my counselling practice, albeit

unintentionally. I am interested in how dominant cultural discourse operates to disguise the privilege that many Pakeha take for granted, including me as counsellor. The effects for me as counsellor of not attending to such dominant cultural discourses on the shaping of my own practice can be the reproduction of these marginalizing ideas and practices. And the effects for counselling of not attending to such a reproduction might be that the woman's account of cultural marginalization is minimally described.

Also in the area of ethical responsibility, I am interested to attend to the effects Augusta-Scott (2007) referred to when he wrote about the essentialising discourses around racism and sexism. He claimed both anti-oppressive and oppressive discourses can be constraining as both produce binary thinking. In my counselling practice I do not wish to take up anti-oppressive practices alone as this may obscure the agency of the woman who has been subject to experiences of marginalisation. Rather, I am interested to explore the ground upon which a woman can voice the experiences of marginalisation she has been subject to, as I support her efforts for agency in her life.

As the ethical responsibility I hold to investigate the effects of marginalisation is a significant thread to this research, I am interested to review the approach I take to counselling for ideas and practices that might subject women to marginalising experiences. Such a review requires reflection on how I as a practitioner can support myself to begin knowing and understanding that which I do not know. It requires reflexivity on the positions I take up and the knowledge I hold as I begin counselling inquiries with the Maori women who consult me. Paré and Larner (2004) wrote:

postmodern practice, like the traditional approaches it critiques, can *also* unfold along colonial dynamics. Even our emancipatory ideals can be turned into unilateral relationships that defy the spirit of collaboration (p. 4).

Paré and Larner highlighted the ethical importance of not only reviewing counselling conversations, but the importance of also reviewing the knowledges and theoretical



positions that inform such counselling. Not taking for granted the ideas that inform the counselling I engage with is an important aspect to my work.

### ***Early influences in the research***

This section introduces aspects of my personal history that have shaped the interest and curiosity I hold, in the lives of others. This history has contributed to the development of an ethically responsible practice that is important to this research. In presenting this history I wish the reader to appreciate its limitations. It does not capture all of the influences that have been shaping of my work with women who have been subject to violence and sexual abuse. Instead it offers a very small glimpse into the events in my life that have influenced this research. I offer two examples to illustrate the development of this history.

#### **Remembering a ballet performance – first example**

I loved dancing. When I was nine or ten, my mother took me to see the New Zealand Ballet perform at the theatre. I was captivated by the entire experience; the theatre, the audience, the dancers, the movement and the beautiful costumes. I recall clearly as I sat waiting for the performance to begin, wondering about the lives of the dancers. I wondered where they lived, who they lived with, how they combined school and ballet and how they had become dancers. These wonderings floated in and out of my mind most of the evening as I watched the performance. As I now write about these experiences of the dancing world, I think about the connection to my counselling work. Just as I was curious to learn about the dancers' lives outside of their identities as performers, in my counselling practice I am also curious to learn about the lives of people who consult me, and in ways that extend beyond that which the problem describes. I am keen to avoid the taken for granted realities of peoples' lives. At this early age, I was developing an interest in exploring the untold stories of peoples' lives.

#### **Recalling school reading – second example**

As a student at High School in the early 1970s, I developed a fascination with reading biographical and autobiographical books. I was captured by the lives of mostly

women and girls, such as Anne Frank and Helen Keller, who had demonstrated courage in the face of great difficulty. The lives I read about were very different from my own as a young teenager growing up in provincial New Zealand. Instead of shying away from stories of difference, I was drawn toward them. Reading about how other women and children lived their lives had me thinking about the values that informed their lives. And in so doing I gave thought to the values that informed the way my family and I lived our life.

As a note to the reader, it is unlikely that I would have explained my interest in the lives of others in the terms I do now. Such explanations have had the benefit of time and age.

### **The effects of these examples**

The reader may ask what these examples have to do with my interest in exploring aspects of cultural identity with Maori women in the counselling context. As I have reflected on the interest I have in offering and taking up cultural conversations in the counselling context I was taken back to my high school reading. A regular theme of many of the books I read during these years was to do with the effects of difference. I was struck by the stories of people who had coped with difficulties life had presented them. They were stories that brought to life the possibility of change within families, communities and society. And as such they were stories that inspired me to think about how I might wish to act in the world. These stories also captured my imagination with regard to wondering how I might respond in similar circumstances.

The context for this high school reading occurred within an environment that was influenced by the traditions of both European and American educational systems. The school was situated within a New Zealand community where government policies of assimilation were implemented at neighbourhood level by the local body council. The school was situated within a community that was believed (by the people in my life) to be fair and equitable. As a high school student I did not appreciate how the books -

which were largely written by European authors - I read contributed to the construction of the world I understood and participated in.

## **School values**

The world I inhabited at high school was predominantly influenced by European cultural values. It was organized in ways that privileged European ways of doing things, European knowledge and European beliefs. I understood these cultural values to be the norm and typical of many people's experiences. It was only upon leaving school that these values became more visible to me. Such cultural values were not named by family, teachers or other students. There was no need for them to be named as they were understood to be values common to the whole school community. As such, these values and practices were taken for granted and viewed as the prevailing standard by which life was lived within families and local communities.

In my early high school years I was not alert to the possibility of different ways of life in Aotearoa / New Zealand, and this was in spite of my noticing students who were Maori. While I could not name the dominant values or practices operating within the school community, I did notice a group of students who were of a different cultural background. These were Maori students. That there was another group of students of a different culture at school was generally not spoken about by either students or staff. And my noticing of both European / Pakeha and Maori students within the school community remained an unvoiced and private observation. I did not know at that time, what such an observation could mean to the understandings I held of the world. Neither could I imagine what my noticing might mean for my future. As a high school student with a very slim understanding about cultural identity, there were no obvious paths to guide me in how I might make sense of such observations. Equally, the social and political context of the 1970s offered minimal analysis of the issues that had captured my interest. I do not mean to suggest analysis of the operation and effects of racism and marginalisation did not occur in the 1970s. Rather such analyses were not available to me as a high school student in ways that helped to make sense of my observations and that did not perpetuate racist ideas.

## ***The rationale for this research***

Thus far, this chapter has presented some of the experiences and beliefs that have shaped the way I respond to difference in both my personal and professional life. However, the reader may still be left wondering the rationale for this research beyond that of a self serving interest. I would like to be clear that this research originates not only from a strong personal interest in appreciating difference and its effects, but also originates from a strong professional commitment to understand how the ideas I engage with around difference may assist or hinder people in their lives.

As a professional counsellor, my interest in undertaking this research has been in part, connected to the idea of contributing to the body of knowledge counsellors may draw on for their own practice. In particular, I am interested in contributing to the field of knowledge and practice where local knowledges are valued alongside scholarly knowledge (White 1997), and to the area of practice where new kinds of conversations might be possible (Te Wiata 2006).

Agee, Culbertson and Mariu (2005) noted that a relatively small body of published material is available for students, practitioners and researchers interested in the area of therapeutic approaches when engaging in counselling with Maori. With this in mind, I am interested in making available to other counsellors and colleagues, the understandings I have reached in the process of undertaking this research. In making these understandings available, I do so cautioning that they have been generated within the context of my own counselling practice, a practice that works to privilege the voices of the women who consult me, and that works towards a process collaborative inquiry. For another counsellor who may have an interest in considering these ideas for her / his own practice, that this research was generated in my practice would need to be taken into account. I offer these understandings not as a set of specific skills to be applied in counselling, but more as potential areas of inquiry and thought. Such understandings might also act as encouragement for counsellors in generating conversations in other aspects of practice.

While the ideas from this research might not be taken up in the same way by other Pakeha counsellors working with Maori women, my hope is that by their presentation in this document, further discussion might be generated. Such discussion might extend the research questions, as practitioners draw on their own experiences of counselling conversations with Maori women. It might develop new questions for research and practice and offer alternative ideas and thoughts on the discussion presented here. Discussion might also head in an altogether different direction.

In addition to the rationale already offered, this research has grown out of a desire to be accountable for the practices I engage with within my counselling room. I hope these practices will be visible in the reading of this research and therefore available for scrutiny and negotiation. Through the articulation of these practices in the research I am not only making them visible for others to consider and contest, I am also making these practices more available to my work with other women who consult me for counselling.

To conclude, I offer the idea that “Most clients regard participating in research as a valuable and important way to help others” (Manthei, 2006, p. 69). All three of the women participating in this project said to me at the conclusion of the research meetings that they hoped their talking with me had been helpful. In particular they hoped their participation and talking would help other Maori women who I met for counselling.

### ***Why do I accept referrals from Maori women?***

Some readers may question the ethics of a counselling practice that sees a Pakeha counsellor working with Maori women. The charge might be laid that in engaging in such counselling I am acting out of ignorance as well as possibly subjecting women to further experiences of colonization through the counselling practices I engage with (Monk, 1998). I have considered the charges the reader might make and I wish to offer the ideas that have influenced this decision in my practice.

I work from a position that acknowledges ethno-cultural identity as significant to any counselling context. It is an area of practice I do not intentionally ignore although I am aware that at times I might unwittingly overlook an invitation offered by a woman to explore this area. In an attempt to counter possible oversights, I invite women to comment on the counselling process. I facilitate this invitation by inquiring, for example, about the usefulness of the counselling to the woman; asking the woman if there are areas in the counselling that she would like to speak about that we haven't discussed; and asking if there are matters of concern that she would like to bring to my attention and discuss. I facilitate this area of inquiry with an interest in and care for the woman. I am interested that the counselling is useful to her and that it addresses the concerns she brings.

When a woman refers herself to me for counselling, I am interested to provide information on all possible counselling services that might be available to her, including Maori based counselling services. I do this as part of the ethical responsibility I have as a member of New Zealand Association of Counsellors (NZAC Code of Ethics) and as a counsellor who has an ethical responsibility to ensure that people access the services that suit their particular circumstances. In saying this, I acknowledge the small number of Maori ACC providers in this locality and the effect this must have on the choice women have in seeking counselling. The decision to engage in counselling with me as a Pakeha counsellor rests with the woman, in the light of available resources and her own lived experience.

As I consider the possible implications for the woman and myself, of working across cultures, I am mindful of the question: who determines who is Maori? I suggest I do not have an entitlement to determine the ethnicity of a person who consults me. Therefore, nor do I have an entitlement to turn people away who are of a different ethno-cultural background to my own, when they have sought out my help. I appreciate that matching the ethnic identity of the counsellor with the person seeking counselling is an important value. I suggest this value must stand alongside respecting the wishes of the person seeking counselling. In my practice I try to work

in ways that avoid producing binary positions for people to step into. By providing the option of counselling for Maori women I hope also that I provide the opportunity for conversations that generate new knowledge, an aspect of cross cultural practice noticed by Te Wiata, (2006). To illustrate this idea I refer to my experience as a woman counsellor consulting a supervisor who is male. This relationship, while not matched on gender offers opportunities for inquiry and learning. As my supervisor inquires of my knowledge and experience as a woman, I experience this as a collaborative process and one in which my knowledge and experience is privileged. We are engaged in a two way learning process (White, 1997) which acknowledges the relations of power that can exist in a supervisor / practitioner relationship. This supervision relationship includes exploration of many of the ethical considerations I work toward when meeting with Maori women for counselling and which I have referred to in this section.

Lastly when working with Maori women, I bring to the counselling a genuine interest in their experience of personhood. I am interested in the many identities a person takes up in the varying aspects of their lives, not only those identities determined by culture.

### ***This research asks three questions:***

On the basis of these interests, this research project explored the following questions.

What do I as a pakeha counsellor draw on, in offering and taking up conversations about aspects of cultural identity, when counselling Maori women?

What are some of the effects of offering and taking up conversations about aspects of cultural identity for the woman's sense of identity?

What are some of the effects of offering and taking up conversations about aspects of cultural identity for the work of counselling?

## ***A note about terminology: client, conversation and culture***

In this section I briefly explain three terms that appear regularly in this document, to clarify the meaning of the terms as they are used in this writing. I am aware for example, that *culture* is a widely used word and has many meanings and therefore I wish to clarify for the reader how I am using them in this context. The terms are, culture, conversation and client.

### **Culture**

In this project I frequently refer to culture. For the purposes of this research, culture refers to the ethno-cultural identity of the woman consulting me. I appreciate there is wide range of literature available which considers this term. However in deciding to use this word I have taken into account its use by the women themselves.

### **Conversation**

I use the term *conversation* throughout this thesis to capture the quality of the talk the three women and I were engaged in together as we explored the counselling in research meetings. The talk was at times excited and energetic, at other times full of pain and distress, and yet at other times thoughtful and considered. In all of this we were engaged together. “Engaging with is experientially different from being acted upon by another ...” (Bird, 2000, p.30).

I acknowledge for one participant the term conversation, held some uncertainty. However the times I have used, conversation, I do so with the intent referred to by Drewery and Winslade (1997):

Conversation is a very good metaphor for the social process of meaning making, as it has just the right pattern of to-ing and fro-ing. It focuses our attention on the interaction of people rather than on the intrapersonal dynamics of the individual. Narrative therapy seeks to harness such ideas about the power of language and how the self is formed and reformed. This is an ongoing process, and one that is never finished, (p.39).



## **Client**

I prefer not to use the term ‘client’ to describe a person who seeks my assistance as counsellor. In part, this relates to my witnessing the effects of such a description in health and welfare settings on the lives of the people to whom ‘client’ refers. At times when people are spoken of as ‘client/s’, I have witnessed them being spoken of in ways which invokes disrespect and disembodiment. While these ways are often unintended their effect is to offer the person minimal agency in their lives. Using ‘client’ as a description can have the effect of separating people into categories of ‘us’ and ‘them’, those who are clients and those who are not. Such separation can produce experiences of Other; that is Other becomes a way of defining who ‘we’ are and who we are not (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1996). Such practices are ones I seek to resist. At times in this document, mostly for the purposes of brevity, and where there might be confusion for the reader, I have used the word ‘client / s’ to refer to people seeking counselling help.

## **Theoretical concepts that inform my counselling practice and this research**

This section introduces the concepts of social constructionism and narrative therapy. These concepts have contributed to my counselling practice and with women who consult me in relation to overcoming the effects of sexual abuse. They are central to how I have undertaken this research and to how I have positioned myself as practitioner researcher. As a narrative counsellor I am interested in the ideas offered by a social constructionist position, and especially the implication they have for the ways people make sense of their lives.

### ***Social constructionism***

“Social constructionism is less a theory than a position on epistemology – theory of knowledge” (Wendy Drewery, personal communication, 2004). Social constructionism is an approach to understanding the world that includes key concepts such as knowledge and meaning; power relations; discourse; positioning; language,

and identity, each of which I describe below. As a worldview, it provides alternative ways to make sense of experiences that resist the scientific objectivity and search for essential truths central to the modernist project. Social constructionism suggests “realities are socially constructed ... are constituted through language ... are organized and maintained through narrative [and there] are no essential truths” (Freedman & Combs, 1996, p. 22).

## **Knowledge**

The ideas offered by social constructionism “insist that we take a critical stance toward our taken-for-granted ways of understanding the world, including ourselves” (Burr, 2003, p.3). Such a position challenges the readily available notions of objective scientific thought, that the world can be understood through observation, and, further, that in these observations, the truth about the nature of the world exists (Burr, 2003). That realities are constructed by interaction with others, as life is lived and over time, is a central theme to social constructionism (Freedman & Combs, 1997). This understanding suggests that knowledge is not fixed and that there is no one truth about an aspect of the world waiting to be discovered by scientific means. Therefore the categories of knowledge that we hold about the world “may not necessarily refer to real divisions”, (Burr, 2003, p. 3). Rather, knowledge, and our understanding of it, is contestable; it changes as it is subject to the social and political conditions of any particular time; and it is influenced and shaped by history and by culture. Thus knowledge and its meaning is produced within the social, political and cultural contexts of peoples lives.

The implication of these ideas for counsellors is significant. Instead of assuming that we ‘know’ the experiences of the people consulting us, a social constructionist position invites us to question the taken-for-granted construction of the lives and difficulties people bring to counselling. It invites us to take a position of curiosity and to trouble the taken-for-granted realities of knowledge that informs the view of the world of the people who seek our assistance. It invites us to think carefully about how lives are constituted, including our professional lives as counsellors.

## **Language**

To explore the taken-for-granted realities people hold about the world requires a shift in the way we think about and use language. Social constructionism views language as “more than a way of simply expressing ourselves” (Burr, 2003, p. 8), rather, it takes the position that language “produces and constructs our experience of each other and ourselves” (Burr, 2003, p. 62). For social constructionists, language does not have an inherent or pre-existing meaning, instead meaning is made with language, in a social context and as such is contestable, negotiated and subject to change. Thus many versions or possibilities of meaning are produced through language (Burr, 2003). As a narrative counsellor I am interested in the language used to describe and make sense of difficulties, and the versions of meaning people have available to them in these descriptions. How we speak to one another has an effect for ourselves and others and the realities we construct about the world. This is a particularly important concept for counselling as most “therapeutic practices are mediated by language” (Bird, 2004, p. 15).

## **Power**

From a social constructionist perspective, knowledge, language and power are inextricably linked. Foucault, a French post structuralist philosopher, understood “language as an instrument of power” (Freedman & Combs, 1997, p. 37).

[D]iscourses of a society determine what knowledge is held to be true, right or proper in that society, so those who control the discourse control the power.

At the same time, the dominant knowledge of a given milieu determines who will be able to occupy its powerful positions. To Foucault, power is knowledge and knowledge is power (Freedman & Combs, 1997, p.39).

The kind of power that interested Foucault was disciplinary power, the power used by a society to control its members without the use of force. As Freedman and Combs (1997) wrote, this power arises from the discourses - sets of beliefs, ideas and practices that support particular views of the world - that operate in a society at any given time. It is the operation of this power that is of interest to narrative counsellors. For it is the use of disciplinary power, that invites people to think and act in particular

ways in their lives. And it is this power that produces the conditions that make it difficult for people to see how the problems they experience have been constructed. Disciplinary power produces the conditions for invisibility, hiding the operation of discourses on peoples' lives. In the terms of narrative therapy, when people experience difficulties disciplinary power leads them to view themselves as the problem, for they judge themselves in terms of the views and standards that are dominant at any particular time. Such an effect supports the view Foucault offered about disciplinary power, as an effective method of social control.

## **Discourse**

“Discourse refers to a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, statements ... that in some way together produce a particular version of events”, (Burr, 2003, p. 64). It is a way of organising and understanding the world and thus provides a way of knowing how to “go on”. Social constructionists understand that discourse is shaping of identity and personhood through the meaning that is made of these particular events. Thus narrative practitioners are interested to explore and deconstruct discourse as a means to “opening up previously unavailable worlds of meaning”, (Winslade & Monk, 2001, p. 125).

It is possible for multiple discourses to operate in the lives of people at any one time. For example, at the time of writing this thesis the discourses of parenthood, family, student and counsellor are but some of the discourses that are shaping of my life and identity. At different times and in different relationships, these discourses may have more or less influence (Wendy Drewery, personal communication, 2004). As there are multiple discourses shaping of people's lives so there are multiple positions within discourses that are available to people. Again, using myself as an example, the discourse of student invites me into a position in relation to other students that is different from the position available to me in relation to teaching staff. Again this is an important concept for narrative counsellors, as it requires us to be alert for and explore the effects of these different positions in the lives of those who consult us. Such reflexivity regard the shaping discourses have on counselling and research

processes is a significant aspect of social constructionism and narrative practice (Burr, 2003; Winslade & Monk, 2001).

## **Positioning**

As a narrative practitioner I am interested in the ways people are positioned by discourse and the effects such positioning has on our lives. Positioning arises in the relational activity of speaking with people (Davies & Harré, 1990). It is also offered on the terms of the discourses that operate in peoples' lives (Burr, 2003). For example, in my position as a counsellor, I am positioned by a set of beliefs and practices that inform how I undertake this activity. These beliefs might include the qualities of good listener, of having empathy, and of having a view on how problems are constructed. Of course these qualities are produced by particular discourses of counselling. What counts as good listening, for example, might be informed by the discourses that view women as good listeners (Drewery, 2005; Davies & Harré, 1990). And what is understood, by many western counselling approaches, as good listening is located in western cultural discourse (Duncalfe, 2002). The implication here for my counselling practice is that for people who seek assistance from me, and for whom a certain kind of listening is important, might expect to be heard by me as counsellor, in that particular way. The person's set of beliefs about being heard might differ from the set of beliefs I practice in my listening. That is, both the person consulting me and I might hold expectations produced by different discourses about listening. It is therefore, important to my counselling that I am alert to the discourses that shape a person's understanding of an event or of an idea and investigate the positions offered by the discourse.

Equally, it is important as a counsellor engaging in therapeutic conversations that I do not offer position calls that are subjugating of the person consulting me. This means that I do not intentionally invite people to speak about their lives in ways that offer little agency. Rather, it means that I work towards addressing the relations of power that exist in the counselling relationship in a transparent and accountable manner. In this, I recognise that the counselling process is itself "as much a social construction"

(Burr, 2003, p. 157) as the accounts people bring to therapy. For this reason I seek to continually review the practices I engage with in counselling.

## **Identity**

“What it is possible to tell depends crucially upon what others are willing to hear”, (Cox, Kershaw, & Trotter, 2000, p xi). While this quote is referring to the conditions that make it possible to disclose sexual abuse, it draws attention to a significant idea of social constructionism. “What it is possible to tell” connects to Drewery’s (1990) and Hare-Mustin’s (1994) discussions on the power of discourse in shaping what can be heard by those who listen and as such, represents a move toward understanding identity as a social construction. In the terms of social constructionism identity is a fluid notion, one that is constructed by the discourses that are available to us and to our relationships with one another. Identity is therefore a weaving together of many threads (Burr, 2003), for example, of age, of gender, of ability, of ethnicity and these threads are constructed through the discourses available in our culture. “What it is possible to tell”, suggests that what might be spoken within counselling depends significantly upon what the counsellor is willing to take up and engage with in the counselling conversation, and this willingness is shaped by the discourses available to both the counsellor and the person.

The therapy room is like a room lined with mirrors. It reflects back only what is voiced within it. When there is a one-way mirror and reflecting team, they too reflect back what has been provided. If the therapist and family are unaware of marginalised discourses, such as those associated with members of subordinate gender, race, and class groups, those discourses remain outside the mirrored room (Hare-Mustin, 1994, p. 22).

In terms of my interest in this project and working towards an understanding of the kinds of conditions that might support conversations about ethno-cultural identity, this is a significant concept. Hare-Mustin, clearly suggests the importance of attending to the many possible discourses that are brought to the counselling room by both counsellor and client, but in particular attending to marginalised discourses. My hope is that by offering an exploration of the discourses that are shaping of a

woman's identity I invite her to make her own identity claims. I also offer this inquiry, in part, as a step toward minimising the possibility of me making assumptions about her cultural identity.

### ***The particularities of my narrative counselling practice***

I now return to the observations of my counselling practice that initially led me to this research. If, as I believe, a reason for the increased numbers of Maori women consulting me for counselling is connected to aspects of my own counselling practice, then it is my professional responsibility to learn more about these aspects, to appreciate what I have done or what I have said in counselling that has encouraged some Maori women to consult me. This is a process referred to as reflexivity (Bird, 2000; Burr, 2003).

In the following sections I highlight those qualities that are important in how I work with people and that have also contributed to my work with the Maori women who have consulted me. These aspects of my work have developed and changed over time as I have engaged with knowledges such as social constructionism. I have reviewed these knowledges and practices as I have engaged with the people who consult me in counselling and in response to the understandings colleagues have offered me in discussion. I prefer to understand the qualities of which I am about to write, more as the threads I weave together to ensure the work I undertake with the women who consult me is ethical, influential and decentred.

### **Appreciating small details**

In my counselling practice I strive to value and appreciate the smallest and frequently quiet details of people's lived experience. White (2004a) referred to this practice as "exoticising the domestic", of taking careful interest in local knowledges. Exoticising refers to the narrative practice of privileging the actions and ideas of a person's life that are frequently overlooked when facing difficulties. It has been a regular comment on my work by people who have consulted me for counselling that I have understood the difficulties they face. I believe this is connected to the ways I have appreciated

and attended to the details of their lives that they bring to counselling. Such a practice is not unique to the counselling I undertake with the women who consult me, rather it is a particular quality of narrative practice that encourages “attention at the level of the word” (Weingarten, 1998, p. 4).

## **Externalising conversations**

As I work toward sharing an understanding of a woman’s experience of abuse, I am interested to work in ways that separate her identity from the effects of the abuse, a practice narrative therapists refer to as externalising (Bird, 2000.; Morgan, 2000.; White, 2007; Epston & White, 1989). For example, a woman might speak about how she is afraid of relationships with men. Instead of identifying fearfulness as the woman’s problem, I might externalize the fear and ask: how do you think this fear / caution got started; what does the fear get you doing; how does the fear invite you act in your life; what does the fear get you thinking about yourself and others; in what way does the fear invite you step away from relationships with men. Such a practice invites women to consider themselves other than a victim or as damaged, as is suggested by traditional psychotherapeutic approaches, suggested by narrative writer, Kamsler, (1990). Instead, externalising conversations invite the woman to take up a position of agency in relation to the effects of the abuse. It encourages an exploration of the ways these effects have been sustained in her life. And it makes visible the woman’s expertise on the effects of the abuse to her life. Externalising conversations also have an effect on the ideas that are readily available to women such as that they are to blame or that in some way women have contributed to the abuse. “I believe this [externalising] is of profound importance in the area of child sexual abuse, where... there has been a tradition of applying pathologising, static labels to people ... [which] supports the view that the problem is the woman herself, and reinforces self-blame and guilt” (Kamsler, 1990, p. 23).

## **Exploring the effects of the abuse**

As I worked with the women of this study in counselling, I did not assume I understood the effects of the abuse on their lives. Nor did I assume I understood the



meaning of these effects on their lives. As counsellor I engage with the person seeking help in a spirit of genuine curiosity. I am curious to learn what the women might have to say (Freedman & Combs, 1996). It is a position of not holding predetermined ideas about responses to an inquiry.

As we investigated the effects of the abuse, the women spoke of how it had altered the way they saw themselves and how it had changed some of the ways they understood their relationship to the world. They spoke of the shame and the anger they experienced and of the effects to their relationships. They spoke of how they used drugs and alcohol to ease the pain of the abuse. In this exploration as a narrative practitioner, I am working to gain an appreciation of the extent of effects of the abuse on a woman's life. And in so doing I am also inviting her to re-tell her story "in such a way that [she] has access to [her] experience of [her] own resourcefulness in the face of the problem (Kamsler, 1990, p.25).

### **Unique moments**

As a woman re-told her experiences of the pain of the abuse, I listened for moments of resistance. White (2007) and White and Epston (1990) referred to these moments in counselling as "unique outcomes". A unique outcome can be a thought, an intention, a hope or an action a person holds that resists the effects of the abuse. It is thus, an event that stands outside the problem saturated story of abuse. For example a unique outcome might be in a woman remembering how she resisted a memory of the abuse from interfering with her relationship with her child. I am also interested to learn the meaning the woman gives to these moments of resistance. In listening for unique moments I am also listening for the history of their development. And I am interested to appreciate how such moments might contribute to the development of an alternative story of identity for the woman. As a narrative practitioner I appreciate these alternative stories can:

bring forth people's skills, abilities, competencies and commitments ... and the act of bringing them forward assists people to reconnect with their

preferences, hopes, dreams and ideas ... [that] will it is assumed, in turn affect future actions, (Morgan, 2000, p. 59).

## **Social and political contexts**

As I investigated the effects of the abuse on the woman's life and the moments when she has stepped away from these effects, I was doing so within the social and political contexts of her life. I was keen to deconstruct (White, 1991) these contexts and explore the contribution they had made to the woman's experiences of the problem. Included in this inquiry is an investigation of the effects of marginalization on the woman's life.

When I am consulted in counselling by women who name their identity as Maori, I am alert to the history of colonization in this country and some of effects this might have for them. In particular, I draw on the work of Hippolite Wright (1998) who wrote about the connection of women's experiences of abuse and the process of colonization in Aotearoa New Zealand. I also draw on events and issues that have occurred in Aotearoa / New Zealand that have effects for many Maori, in order to tentatively create the space into which the women may speak. It is the question of what it becomes possible for them to speak that is of particular interest to me.

Woolford (1990), writing about his involvement as GP with a Maori woman who experienced depression, spoke of these kinds of actions as "a cultural response" (p. 29). The cultural response I am interested in working toward is informed by narrative ideas and practices. In particular, a cultural response would include conversations with people from a position that supported their speaking about practices of marginalisation and that supported their own and my compassionate witnessing (Weingarten, 2003) of these experiences. The development of this cultural response is a work in progress for me. However what I understand about this work so far, is that there are aspects of my counselling practice that seem to make it possible for some Maori women who consult me to engage in conversations that step into alternative

territories of their identities, in particular to engage with aspects of their ethno-cultural identity that has been marginalized.

### **Not knowing I do not know**

Weingarten (2003) wrote of the different positions available when witnessing accounts of peoples' lives. She suggested four positions: empowered and aware, empowered and unaware, disempowered and unaware, and disempowered and aware. As counsellor, I am interested to practice in ways that attend to the effects of these witnessing positions. I am especially interested to investigate those moments when a woman's speaking is lost or unavailable to the conversation, and whether this is an indication that I am occupying an empowered and unaware position. I am referring to the ways in which my speaking might, unintentionally but never the less, marginalise the experiences of the women who consult me. In creating a space and the conditions for women to give voice to the difficulties they experience, I am concerned I may overlook aspects of the social and political contexts that could contribute to the emergence of an alternative story. And that this may restrain women in speaking about how they see themselves as Maori women.

### **A way to proceed**

As I listen closely to the people who consult me, I appreciate the counselling I engage with draws on the myriad experiences my life has offered me. It is in holding these experiences close to me that I hope to be alert to the effects of marginalisation in the women's lives. My intention is to witness the effects of marginalisation by hearing the words of the women who consult me for counselling and by hearing the stories they tell of their life experiences. For many of the women the effects of marginalisation are embodied within aspects of their identities as Maori women.

As I have endeavoured to work towards some understanding of the effects of marginalisation in the lives and identities of some of the Maori women who consult me, I have witnessed moments of exceptional pain and distress. I am interested to pay attention to these moments of distress and pain as much as to the moments of

resistance (White, 2007). It is in the woman giving voice to the pain, that as a counsellor, I am invited to deepen my appreciation of the effects of marginalisation in her life. It is a position of privilege that is extended to me within the counselling relationship and an invitation to render visible the injustices of marginalisation. With this invitation there is a possibility for a way to proceed in co-researching (White, 2007) the effects of marginalisation and together researching a preferred identity. Of this, the careful scaffolding of conversation involved in proceeding, White (2007) wrote: “This scaffolding makes it possible for people to incrementally and progressively distance from the known and familiar toward what it might be possible for them to know and to do” (p. 263).

### **Tentative enquiry**

Offering and taking up opportunities to explore the effects of marginalisation on the lives of Maori women who consult me has been developing in my practice through a process of tentative enquiry. Tentative enquiry has involved positioning myself with a genuine curiosity and interest in the lives of the women; drawing on the theoretical influences of social constructionism, and being alert to ideas and events in our New Zealand society that might support tentative enquiries. These knowledges have provided guidance in how to proceed with an ethic of care when working with women whose lives have been subject to practices of abuse and marginalisation. To illustrate I will offer a fictional example that draws on the many experiences of families who have consulted me.

When working with a young Maori man and his child who had been subject to abuse, I was interested to learn of the young boy’s competence in Te Reo. After some discussion about the history of this competence, I tentatively inquired whether he preferred that I greet him and his father using Te Reo when they arrived at my office. This inquiry generated further discussion which included suggestions from the boy and the father about how I might include Te Reo in their counselling and with other Maori families I met.

## **Feminist thought**

The counselling I engage with has been informed by feminist thought, especially in regard to women who have been subject to sexual abuse. A feminist analysis of sexual abuse privileges the voices of women and children in these accounts and draws attention to the relations of power that exist and therefore makes abuse possible.

Mann & Russell (2003) wrote “Child sexual abuse can only occur due to an imbalance in relations of power” (p. 2). Saphira (1985) positioned her writing about sexual abuse and its effects on women and children in Aotearoa New Zealand as a means “... to break the silence and dispel the myths surrounding sexual abuse” (p.4). In this way, Saphira challenged the traditional constructions of sexual abuse as a woman’s problem. At the same time she made visible the real effects of sexual abuse on the lives of many women in this country and in so doing demonstrated that silence protects the power of those who abuse. It is the practice of creating space for women’s accounts of abuse to be heard; of making visible the relations of power that exist when abuse occurs, and of deconstructing the beliefs around sexual abuse, amongst other things, that I am interested in attending to in my own narrative counselling.

Feminist analysis has also informed this research project. Of note, feminist ideas have been concerned with how the voices of women are represented in research and in particular with how in such research, women have been constructed as Other.

Kitzinger and Wilkinson (1996) wrote:

An important form of ‘control’ exerted by dominant or hegemonic groups over Other is control over their processes of representation. Others’ representations of themselves (and certainly their representations of ‘us’) are routinely ‘de-authroised’, dismissed as neither credible nor coherent (p. 9).

In this research I am interested to represent the voices of the women who have been subject to experiences of marginalisation across gender and ethnicity, with respect. I wish to honour their contribution to the work I undertake with other women who consult me. I also hope to make visible their contribution to my life.

## Autoethnography

This thesis is about how I link the ideas of narrative practice to research practice. Narrative ideas such as positioning, externalising, unique outcomes, tentativeness and curiosity have informed how I have undertaken this research. This thesis is also very much about how I weave together the personal experiences of my life to the professional experiences of counselling. It is about how I draw on these experiences to build a relationship with the women who consult me. “[Autoethnography] is a performance that asks how our personal account counts” (Holman Jones, 2005, p. 764). As such, this research demonstrates how I keep attuned to the social and political contexts of Aotearoa New Zealand and how these contexts offer me ways of engaging with ideas in counselling. It demonstrates how being attuned to these contexts offers opportunities for exploring concerns and experiences in women’s lives. All of this situates this study as a kind of autoethnography. However it is not only autoethnographic for it involves interviewing three women and representing their stories and my understanding of their stories.

## A brief summary of my position

In this project I am not positioning myself as a counsellor with expertise in counselling Maori women. I am positioning myself as a counsellor with an ethical responsibility to appreciate the effects, for counselling, when the counsellor is Pakeha and the person consulting me is Maori. I write this as an opportunity to explore my own ideas, raise questions and issues, and bring forth assumptions and practices that may or may not be helpful when working across cultures. It is an opportunity to think about *how* I engage in conversations where cultural difference exists and how I do this in a way that is respectful. I do not presume that what I write will be the experience of all Maori women and all Pakeha counsellors in counselling relationships. Indeed, the understanding I share here is a reflection of my experiences with three women who have consulted me for counselling. It is very much *my experience* as a Pakeha counsellor working with Maori women.

The following chapter introduces the literature that has informed much of my counselling practice and this research project. This review began tentatively in 2006 when I was preparing for the writing of a practice paper, “Working with the effects of sexual abuse and cultural difference”. The review has brought forward knowledge that I had previously not known about and it also provided the opportunity to revisit familiar knowledge.

## **Chapter two: Literature review**

This literature review explores ideas about culture and identity within the context of Aotearoa New Zealand. I examine ideas of Pakeha culture and identity and the effects these ideas might have on counselling practice and working with Maori. This review considers some of the central themes in the history of the development of counselling with Maori. It explores the contributions of Maori and Pakeha researchers to the field of counselling practice and the influence some of their ideas have in terms of working with Maori. It also considers the effects of marginalisation from a feminist perspective.

In this review I have kept to the fore my interest in developing and appreciating the knowledge, skills and ethical position required in counselling, when working with Maori women. I have been drawn to research and writing around inclusive practices; to writers addressing the effects of colonization on the lives of indigenous people; to researchers and practitioners working with the issue of Pakeha identity and culture. I have largely focused this literature review (although not exclusively) on the work of writers and researchers living in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Literature relating to Pakeha culture and Pakeha identity begins this review as an acknowledgment of my own cultural identity and at the same time as an invitation to the reader to consider their own cultural identity. Key matters relating to Pakeha culture and identity such as, privilege, visibility, and dominance are identified as useful areas for exploration within the counselling context. The effect of Pakeha culture on the lives of people who consult counsellors is reviewed, as well as the ways Pakeha culture influences the stories told by people within the counselling context. And the changing nature of Pakeha identity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is considered in the counselling context.



## ***Pakeha culture, Pakeha identity***

In order to have an appreciation of another's culture and identity, counsellors must also have an appreciation and understanding of their own culture and identity (Lago, 2006; Tuckwell, 2002).

Ideas about what constitutes pakeha identity and what defines pakeha culture differ according to who we ask, their location in history and the context of their lives (Consedine & Consedine, 2005; King, 2001, 2003). Therefore the meaning ascribed to any one description of pakeha identity or pakeha culture is also shaped by history, by context, and by lived experience. Pakeha culture changes and is shaped in response to a unique set of circumstances. Winslade and Monk referred to culture as a fluid rather than fixed concept: "The concept of culture is not stable. It slips out of our grasp just when we think we have a handle on it" (In press).

## **Visibility and the dominant culture**

Black and Huygens (2007), in writing about the importance of making pakeha culture visible to the practice of psychology raised what is also a significant concern for the field of counselling in Aotearoa New Zealand: "The practice of psychology in Aotearoa has firm foundations in Pakeha culture" (p.49). Thus, as much as counselling is interested in how to go about working across cultures, equal attention must be given to understanding Pakeha culture and the influence this culture then has on the day to day practice of counselling.

Pakeha culture is the dominant culture in Aotearoa. It is understood by those who belong to be the typical and normal way of life in Aotearoa New Zealand. Such an understanding sees Pakeha culture not as a unique and identifiable culture, but one that is taken for granted and experienced everyday for most people living within New Zealand. These ideas are an effect of a culture which acts with dominance and power and which Smith (1999) referred to as relying on the practices of imperialism and colonisation.

A feature of a dominant culture is that its practices and beliefs become invisible to those who are its members (Black & Huygens, 2007; Tuckwell, 2001). For those who are not members, aspects of Pakeha culture are highly visible and the acts of cultural dominance and power become experiences of oppression, marginalisation and racism. When aspects of Pakeha culture are clearly identifiable, they then become available for critique and inquiry. When the practices of cultural dominance remain obscured, there are fewer opportunities to examine the effects on the lives of those living within Aotearoa New Zealand.

## **Privilege**

Pakeha culture occupies a position of privilege in Aotearoa New Zealand. Privilege is a term used to describe:

unearned rights, benefits, immunity and favours that are bestowed on individuals and groups solely on the basis of their race, culture, religion, gender, sexual orientation, physical ability or other key characteristics.

(Raheim, Carey, Waldegrave, Tamesese, Tuhaka, Fox, Franklin, White and Denborough).

Privilege operates in many different forms to advantage some groups while denying those same advantages to others; it is an operation of power. In the context of Pakeha culture, privilege operates to support Pakeha / Western values and beliefs being taken as the norm and then “we are unable to see how our lives are made easier” (Raheim, et al, p. 3). Without examining unearned privilege, the way it operates, the interests of those it serves, and those it least serves, it is much less likely we are able to hear and listen to the stories of people who do not receive the benefits of belonging to the privileged group. An effect of this privilege then becomes the perpetuation of experiences of marginalisation for people who do not hold privilege. The negative effects and operation of privilege in Aotearoa New Zealand are evident in the health and education systems. Information from Te Puni Kokiri show Maori experience poorer health (<http://tpk.govt.nz/maori/health/default.asp>) than non Maori and have lower educational achievement than non Maori (<http://tpk.govt.nz/maori/education/default.asp>). As a response to the unhelpful

effects of privilege on the lives of Maori, Black and Huygens (2007) drew attention to the position Pakeha hold in having such privilege, and invite action in respect of these injustices:

The legacy for Maori is well documented in health, welfare and justice statistics. For Pakeha there is a choice, to accept white privilege and its benefits or to take responsibility for such cultural injustice and act, both personally and institutionally, to bring about a culturally just society (p.51).

## **Privilege and professional practice**

I believe that counselling practice requires counsellors to engage in an exploration of privilege. It requires counsellors to examine the effects of privilege on their personal and professional lives and to consider how these experiences might influence professional practice. Professional practice involves consideration of how the operation of privilege influences the areas available for inquiry during the counselling process and how the effects of privilege might influence the meaning that is made of the difficulties people experience in their lives. Raheim et al, suggested practitioners pay careful attention to the diverse ways marginalisation, as an effect of privilege, is experienced by the people who consult them. They advocated counsellors examine the operation of privilege on their own lives as well as on the lives of those who seek their services.

## **Pakeha identity in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

Te Wiata (2006) introduced the notion of what it means to be Pakeha in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. She argued that current ideas about Pakeha identity differ from those constructed by ancestors and referred to a distinct set of circumstances which provided the opportunity for an alternative Pakeha identity to emerge, that being the relationship between Maori and Pakeha. “Unique to the New Zealand context is the interaction of pakeha New Zealanders with indigenous Maori New Zealanders” (p.4). Te Wiata suggested the difference between our Pakeha forebears’ identity and the current identity claims of Pakeha is the significant contributions of Maori cultural knowleges to current pakeha identity. Such an alternative construction of Pakeha

identity is what King (2001, 2003) referred to as an indigenous pakeha identity, one that has been shaped by the history of associations and relationship with Maori. King described aspects of his own experience of 21<sup>st</sup> century Pakeha identity to illustrate his point: “And I am part of a culture that has been here long enough now to transform itself, in association with the land and the tangata whenua culture, into something that is, in effect a second indigenous culture” (2001, p.103).

Educational researcher, Glynn (2007) also referred to his own experiences when describing aspects of his pakeha identity. Glynn described his experiences as a pakeha within a ‘whanau-of-interest’ in an educational research project: “...my identity as a Pakeha person is never compromised. Indeed, through engagement and interaction with the whanau, my understanding of what it means to be Pakeha has deepened” (2007, p13).

Te Wiata, King and Glynn each highlighted the importance of the ways in which aspects of Maori culture have influenced pakeha identity both historically and in current society.

### **Changing Pakeha identity and counseling practice**

A changing Pakeha identity has implications for counsellors and for counselling practice. Te Wiata (2006) investigated with a small group of Pakeha New Zealand counsellors how the work they did, sought “...to honour Maori knowleges alongside dominant Western knowleges...” (p.5). It explored the space “in between” (p.6) the common singular, separate (and often problematic) construction of Maori culture/identity and Pakeha culture/identity, as a territory where new and alternative accounts of identity could be generated. She claimed in the “in between” space stands neither the tradition of Maori or Pakeha culture/identity, rather there stands the possibility of cultures and identities that have been influenced by each other and by the history of relationship. The significance of this “in between” space to counselling is best represented by Te Wiata as a “carefully crafted space for very often difficult identity conversations to occur and for voices to be heard” (p.iv). Therefore, it is

reasonable to think that the more recent identity claims of both Maori and Pakeha, such as King and Te Wiata suggested, make possible counselling conversations that have sensitivity to aspects of ethno-cultural identity.

### ***Central themes in the history of the development of a culturally sensitive counselling practice.***

This section explores aspects of the history of ideas informing a culturally sensitive counselling practice. It presents biculturalism and cultural sensitivity as ethical positions for social service practitioners, and it acknowledges the Treaty of Waitangi as a document that guides practice. It is possible to read the following account as a linear process, however to do so minimizes the complexity of these developments.

Each of the following headings (although not exhaustive) represents a thread of knowledge that has contributed to the development of ideas and practice when providing services for Maori in social service settings. The ideas have been shaped and produced within a context of practitioners and researchers seeking to address the visible injustices experienced by many Maori.

#### **Biculturalism**

A search through the New Zealand Journal of Counselling and the New Zealand Counselling and Guidance Association Journal provides a glimpse into how counselling has arrived at its current position and understandings in relation to working with Maori. In the mid 1980s, biculturalism became a familiar term and was seen as “a legitimate social policy objective in its own right and as a necessary prerequisite for greater cross cultural understanding” (Abbott & Durie, 1987. p 14). As a way of working alongside Maori, concepts of biculturalism advocated for organisations to implement practices which took as their reference the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi. According to Abbott and Durie, areas of social work and medicine took up some of these challenges while the field of counselling was slower to take up the initiative. In response to what Maori saw as an inability of institutions to respond to the needs of Maori, participants at the 1985 Mental Health Foundation

Conference called for research into psychotherapy and counsellor education training programmes (Abbott & Durie, 1987). The proposed research was to establish the extent to which biculturalism was a component of the training for counsellors and psychotherapists.

### **Biculturalism and the effects for Pakeha practitioners**

In practice, biculturalism requires counsellors to have an understanding of Taha Maori including knowledge of Te Reo, tribal affiliations and marae protocol (Durie, 2001). For Pakeha these understandings are not necessarily accessed with ease and so many social service organizations employ staff with skills to work with Maori within their local communities.

### **Biculturalism and the effects for Maori**

The appointment of Maori staff to social service agencies provided Maori families seeking assistance with the opportunity to have their cultural values and preferences privileged in the helping process (Durie, 2001). Pakeha practitioners consulted Maori staff for advice and support with language skills, waiata, and protocol for visiting and working with whanau. The appointment of Maori to organisations can be seen as a step towards fairness in the provision of services, but at the same time Maori staff members are frequently positioned to be responsible and accountable for the cultural responsiveness of the organisation to the wider community. In the 1990s when such positions were viewed as a step toward bicultural practice, Maori continued to claim organisations were not attending to the structural aspects of discriminatory practice (Durie & Hermansson, 1990). While some non Maori practitioners demonstrated genuine attempts to work in alternative ways with Maori families, the policies of the organisations within in which they worked often did not support these efforts adequately (Smith, 1990).

Current views on the practice of biculturalism within the discipline of psychology are expressed by Herbert and Morrison who suggested “A bicultural position in Aotearoa / New Zealand is one that shows Maori partnership and participation in mainstream settings” (2007. p 38) and “where Maori can explore both indigenous and mainstream

knowledge to develop what we as Maori consider beneficial for Maori” (p 39). These observations hold significance for counselling practice.

### **Cultural sensitivity**

As suggested by Herbert and Morrison, biculturalism is as much a matter for practitioners in 2007 as it was for practitioners in the 1990s. During the intervening period, discussion on biculturalism in the fields of counselling, social work and nursing included a consideration of what contributed to a culturally sensitive practice (Durie, 1989; Durie & Hermansson, 1990; Waldegrave, 1993). A preferred position identified by some Maori was that they alone would work with Maori people seeking assistance and that Pakeha practitioners would cease to work with Maori. Along with this call was the request for Pakeha to relinquish resources and entrust them to Maori providers and practitioners. These appeals came at a time when Maori organisations were poorly positioned in terms of resourcing, staffing and skill development. An effect of poorly resourced services on Maori meant the options available for assistance were reduced (Smith, 1990). For Pakeha service organisations and practitioners, the request to relinquish resources and act in culturally sensitive ways was and still is a complex matter.

Smith (1990) claimed the notion of cultural sensitivity contributes to the conditions which support discriminatory and racist practices. She suggested when Maori claimed the right to work with Maori and demanded Pakeha end all work with Maori, Pakeha organisations were presented with an opportunity to avoid learning, thinking and considering the world view of Maori and thereby side stepping the responsibilities described in the Principles of the Treaty of Waitangi. An effect of such an avoidance position raises the question of who then does work with Maori.

### ***Cultural sensitivity and counselling practice***

The history of development of counselling practice gives an account of the request for Maori to work with Maori and it also reveals a commitment by Pakeha practitioners to address the issue of cultural sensitivity in counselling work.

There are examples of Pakeha counsellor practitioners and researchers reviewing the effects of dominant discursive practices when providing professional social services to Maori (Drewery 1990), and of Pakeha practitioners seeking an appreciation of alternative accounts of the world and the significance of these accounts to counselling work with Maori (Manthei, 1990).

Pakeha counsellors took up the challenge of working in a culturally sensitive way with Maori by discussing issues of justice and equity, power relations and partnership. The meanings and implications of biculturalism and cultural sensitivity to counselling practice within the New Zealand context were explored from a pakeha perspective (Drewery, 1990; Manthei, 1990).

Drewery (1990) explored the possible effects of discourse on the lives of Maori people who consult Pakeha counsellors. She called attention to how the voices of Maori, which are located outside the dominant discourse of speaking and of listening, are frequently not heard and are even appropriated into the terms of the dominant discourse. The effect of this for counselling practice means the stories Maori tell of their experiences are often interpreted and given meanings in the terms of those who are listening. “In such circumstances, there may be many things we are unable to say, not because we could not say them, but because they cannot be heard” (Drewery, 1990, p. 12). Drewery’s analysis required Pakeha practitioners to be alert to the speaking positions offered by discourse within the counselling context. She suggested that to ignore the effects of discourse would mean the effects of power relations and marginalisation go unattended.

## **Partnership and Te Tiriti o Waitangi**

Acknowledgment of the principles of The Treaty of Waitangi by many social service organisations in the 1980’s was an invitation to work in a partnership of accountability. Professional bodies such as Aotearoa / New Zealand Association of Social Workers and the New Zealand Association of Counsellors responded to the idea of partnership within their own structures. In 1986 the Aotearoa New Zealand



Association of Social Workers acknowledged the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi by forming a Tangata Whenua Caucus. The bicultural partnership established by the Caucus is reflected throughout the structure of ANZASW (retrieved [www.anzasw.org.nz/bi-cultural-partnership.html](http://www.anzasw.org.nz/bi-cultural-partnership.html) 2.01.08 ANZASW), where equitable and inclusive relationships are fostered, where there is a respect for difference and where there is an acknowledgment of diverse realities of its members.

The idea of partnership and biculturalism is also reflected in the Code of Ethics of the New Zealand Association of Counsellors:

This code needs to be read in conjunction with the Treaty of Waitangi and New Zealand law... Counsellors shall seek to be informed about the meaning and implications of the Treaty of Waitangi for their work. They shall understand the principles of protection, participation and partnership with Maori (NZAC, 2002, 1).

The New Zealand Association of Counsellors Code of Ethics offers guidelines for practice and states:

Counsellors shall take account of their own cultural identity and biases and seek to limit any harmful impact of these in their work with clients. (NZAC, 2002, 5.2 (a)).

Counsellors shall learn about and take account of the diverse cultural contexts and practices of the clients with whom they work (NZAC, 2002, 5.2 (c)).

Other social service organizations, for example Women's Refuge, also acknowledged the principle of partnership and Te Tiriti o Waitangi which in turn has led to the development of parallel services. (retrieved <http://www.womensrefuge.org.nz/index.cfm?objectid=OCFAF54E-1321-AE99-698D3F49357E3F8C> 19.3.08 Women's Refuge).

Smith (1990) suggested that parallel development within social service organizations raised many concerns. She asked whether Maori organisations received the same access to resources as their Pakeha counterpart and if Maori services received the

equivalent authority when speaking about the people who used their organisation. She also questioned whether Maori organisations were subject to the ideas that inform pakeha organisations or whether they were able to reference their own values and practices. These concerns are also concerns for Pakeha practitioners who are committed to the principles of partnership, Te Tiriti o Waitangi and social justice.

### ***Contributions by Maori to current counselling practice***

There is a significant tradition of Maori researchers and practitioners in psychology, education and social services (Awatere, 1981, 1982a, 1982b 1983a, 1983b; Durie, 1989, 2001; Durie & Hermansson, 1990 Hippolite Wright, 1998; Smith, 1990) who have extended invitations to Pakeha researchers and practitioners to attend to aspects of Maori life in ways which are respectful of cultural difference. These invitations have been made as result of the experiences many Maori have had in their dealings with institutions. Hospitals, courtrooms, schools and social service agencies have been requested to review the practices and ideas informing work their with Maori clients (Bishop, 2003; Durie, 2001; Snedden, 2005), the claim being that western systems have frequently produced unhelpful, if not discriminatory accounts and explanations of Maori experiences (Durie, 2001). Maori included the domains of counselling, psychology and psychiatry in their request for more respectful practice. However there was a slowness to respond.

### **Maori Sovereignty, counselling, and respectful practice**

An early voice in the request for respectful practices, (although some may have experienced and understood this request as a non negotiable demand) was Donna Awatere, at that time an educational psychologist and political activist. Awatere presented at alternative account of New Zealand society when she wrote a series of articles on Maori Sovereignty (1982a, 1982b, 1983a, 1983b) for the feminist magazine Broadsheet. Her account challenged people to consider the implications of the Treaty of Waitangi to society in Aotearoa / New Zealand. It raised important concerns about who benefited and who was advantaged by continuing to view New Zealand from the perspective of a unified people. Implicit in Awatere's writing was the challenge to Pakeha institutions and practitioners to review the ideas informing

their work with Maori people. Awatere claimed Pakeha ways of working were neglectful and uninformed of Maori people's preferred ways of being in their lives.

Awatere made a claim for Maori Sovereignty - the right of Maori people to have control and authority over their own lives - as a means of addressing the issues of racism she saw operating in many areas of Maori people's lives. Her early work as a psychologist raised concerns that continue to be asked in current counselling practice. For example, there is the question of who defines the problem. Awatere, like Durie (2001) and Durie and Hermansson (1990), challenged western traditional psychological theories that informed counselling practice. Her clear message suggested such theories and practices are tools of oppression, especially for Maori.

The Broadsheet articles are a connection to the early history of the development of ideas in working with Maori. They provided a context for discussion of further concerns relating to the experiences of Maori people.

### **A Maori feminist approach – Debbie Hippolite Wright**

“Maori are becoming authors of their own experiences”, suggested Hippolite Wright, 1998. Hippolite Wright is a Maori feminist researcher who explored the contribution and relationship of gender and culture to the experiences of women's lives. She made a link between the experiences of marginalization of Maori women in New Zealand society and the abuse many are subjected to, suggesting abuse is a form of oppression. She argued that counselling requires an analysis of gender and culture and an analysis of current and historical forms of oppression and marginalisation.

From her research, Hippolite Wright developed a “Koru” model for counselling Maori women who have been subjected to sexual abuse. In the model she weaves together the theoretical perspectives of tikanga Maori, ecological psychology, social systems theory and feminist theory and draws on the key Maori concepts of Aroha, Manaakitanga, Whanaungatanga, Tapu and Noa and Mana to develop what she argued are key tasks for counselling Maori women. She suggested that in order for

the counselling process to work towards the restoration of these concepts for the woman, her whanau, hapu and iwi, the context of women's lives is critical to any counselling that is undertaken. Her argument for the inclusion, in counselling, of the effects of the abuse on the wider whanau, hapu and iwi is significant in that it is different from the traditional western and largely individual approaches to counselling:

[A] framework for healing most appropriate for Maori recognises that child sexual abuse is part of a larger phenomenon. It implies that survivors heal within the context of their social, cultural and spiritual environment (p. 233).

Hippolite Wright's study is a significant piece of research as it addresses the particularities of working with Maori women in overcoming the effects of sexual abuse. It privileges the women who took part in the research by giving their voices space within the body of the thesis. It also seeks to appreciate and evaluate the effects of the counselling with Maori women in relation to Maori ways, or taha Maori.

Hippolite Wright's research findings have been included in "Best Practice Guidelines for assessment and treatment of people who have experienced mental injury as a result of sexual assault", (In press), a project undertaken by Massey University and ACC. These guidelines are intended to support the counselling practice of ACC practitioners working in the area of sexual abuse trauma, and to ensure the best possible service for Maori people seeking assistance in overcoming the effects of sexual abuse.

### **A Maori health perspective – Mason Durie**

"Culture plays an extremely important part in counselling" suggested Durie (1989). Through witnessing the effects of the mental health system on many Maori, Durie (1989, 2001) and Durie and Hermansson (1990) have contributed to the understanding and knowledge social service practitioners have available to them when working with Maori. Durie was critical of western counselling approaches then practiced in Aotearoa / New Zealand. He claimed, with an emphasis on western

reductionism and the effect being largely negative, such approaches could not be more different to Maori thinking and ways of living. Durie suggested understanding the meaning and importance of “wider relationships” to the well being of Maori, essential in working with Maori clients: “Emphasis on relationships reflects a Maori belief that personal understanding, knowledge, and awareness derive from outside the individual, not within” (Durie, 2003. p.49). It is in connection with these differences that Durie wrote of the difficulty many Maori people experience in encountering the traditional models of counselling practiced in New Zealand; for example the western tradition of separating feelings from thoughts, and of separating oneself from ancestors. The effect of culturally inappropriate mental health services on Maori lives is well documented by Durie, Awatere and others.

Durie offers a very helpful guide to counsellors engaging in counselling with Maori and suggests such concepts may reflect more closely the lived experiences of those seeking assistance. It is fair to assume Durie speaks to largely Pakeha practitioners and particularly to aspects of practice that are taken for granted. Most notably he questions the lens through which the experiences of Maori people who consult Pakeha practitioners are constructed (2007). Durie suggested in order for Pakeha practitioners to have an appreciation of Maori experiences, a shift in thinking and positioning is required.

### ***Contribution of the Lower Hutt Family Centre to current counselling practice***

The question arises, if Pakeha counsellors give attention to the ideas offered by Durie, how might this contribute to an alternative appreciation of the difficulties experienced by Maori who seek assistance? The following reviews the work of the Lower Hutt Family Centre and its contribution to address the injustices produced by western counselling practices.

## **Just therapy**

‘Just Therapy,’ developed by the Lower Hutt Family Centre in the 1980s emerged following consultation with local community groups and in response to the diversity of people who sought the agency’s services. As a service, it acknowledged the wider contexts of gender and culture in which peoples’ lives are lived and challenged the western social science models which predominated many social service agencies (Tamasese & Waldegrave, 1994).

The Lower Hutt Family Centre, which includes Maori, Pacific Island and Pakeha sections, operates as a collective with the guiding principle of “responsible partnerships” (Tamasese & Waldegrave, 1994). The Pakeha unit, acknowledging its position of privilege is accountable to the other cultural units for its work with families and its work within the organisation. Women and men staff members also meet separately to ensure issues of gender are addressed within the organisation and within counselling practice.

Just Therapy is an attempt to be accountable for the effects of cultural and gender discrimination within the structure of The Lower Hutt Family Centre and within the counselling services provided to families. It seeks to make visible the effects of discrimination, poverty and unemployment on the lives of families. And in so doing situates the problems experienced by people within a social and political context.

The following questions by Tamasese and Waldegrave, although written in 1994 continue to be useful to counselling practice and organisational structures in 2007.

How do workers, women, men and people of different cultures in an agency or institution, protect against gender and cultural bias in their work on a day to day basis? Furthermore how do they do this in societies where sexist and racist assumptions are an integral part of the upbringing and way of life, as they are in most industrial states? (Tamasese & Waldegrave, 1994, p.55).

The questions encourage reflexivity, an exploration of biases and privilege, and an examination of their effects on the lives of the people who consult counsellors.

## ***The effects of marginalization***

### **Feminist analyses and responses**

Feminist analysis has influenced approaches to counselling by assisting the voices of women and children to be heard (Saphira, 1985; Cox, Kershaw & Trotter, 2000). At the same time, such analyses have located the experiences of women and children in the wider context of women's lives. Therefore, a feminist approach to counselling includes a critique of history, an analysis of patriarchal ideas and practices and an analysis of power relations and how these ideas have contributed to women's and children's experiences. As well, feminist analyses have also contributed to a critique of the effects of ethno-cultural marginalisation in the lives of women, both in general society and within the feminist movement itself (Espin, 1995; hooks, 1989).

Cultural marginalisation / racism not only operates well within the structures of everyday society, it also operates in the areas that have been responsible for challenging and changing oppressive practices under which groups of people live. Feminist, Espin (1995) wrote about the invisibility of racism within the history of the feminist movement. While she acknowledged feminist analyses assisted many groups of women in validating their lived experiences, Espin suggested the group most supported by the work of feminism continued to be white and middle class women. She claimed practices operating in wider society continued to be reproduced within feminist practices. In particular she wrote about the effects of "cultural imperialism" on groups of women who continued to be marginalised.

Cultural imperialism involves the paradox of experiencing oneself as invisible at the same time that one is marked out as different. The invisibility comes about when the dominant groups fail to recognize the perspective embodied in their cultural experience as *a* perspective (Espin, 1995, p.130).

Espin's work resonates with that of Smith. Both address the idea held by the dominant cultural group, within their respective countries (White Americans / Pakeha New Zealanders), that white identity is the norm by which other cultures are

determined and measured. “The dominant group gives itself the right to see its perspective as universal rather than culturally determined ...” (Espin, 1995, p.130). It is apparent from critiques such as those of Espin and Smith that feminism is not immune from inequality and the production of ‘other’.

Tuckwell (2002) wrote from her experiences as a therapist, educator and researcher working, living in the multicultural society of the United Kingdom. A central theme of her work is inviting white therapists who work with people from racial groups different to that of the counsellors to consider and examine the unspoken assumptions associated with being white. For example, she suggested examining the idea that white ethno-cultural identity is the norm against which groups of different ethno-cultural identity are identified and measured. She argued that a history of “white invisibility” (p. 82) has operated to such an extent that “white people have barely spoken about being white” (p. 82), claiming an appreciation of what it means to be white has been an area steered away from (often unintentionally) by many practitioners. Her position advocated that white counsellors should understand the history of their own white identity in order to work with clients from different racial backgrounds. Tuckwell wrote that an understanding of history provides an opportunity for developing a more meaningful white identity and for being able to investigate the effects of this identity on the counselling process.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has highlighted the effects our identity as Pakeha can have on the counselling work we undertake. In particular it has explored the changing nature of Pakeha identity in Aotearoa New Zealand, and the possibility this brings for new kinds of conversations to occur in the counselling room.

The review shows the development of an awareness and sensitivity amongst social service agencies and practitioners in Aotearoa New Zealand, of the effects of marginalisation in the lives of Maori. It notes how the challenges made by Maori, to



Pakeha, to acknowledge the Principles of The Treaty of Waitangi, prompted this development.

Models and concepts that might be useful in guiding practitioners in working with Maori have also been explored. For example the ethic of social justice in counselling practice, (Waldegrave, 1993; Tamasese & Waldegrave, 1994); the social, cultural and spiritual context within which Maori women heal from the effects of sexual abuse, (Hippolite Wright, 1998); the importance of understanding Maori values in counselling, (Durie, 1989, 2001); the significance of the historical context of Aotearoa New Zealand, (Awatere, 1982a, 1982b, 1983a, 1983b; Smith, 1990, 1999), and the importance of understanding the operation of privilege both within and outside of the counselling context, (Raheim et al; Tuckwell, 2002).

## **Chapter three: The approach to this research**

### ***Introduction***

This chapter offers an overview of the approach to this research from the very tentative beginnings through to the final meeting and writing of this document. It is a qualitative research project which, “at its heart, ... involves doing one’s utmost to map and explore the meaning of an area of human experience’ (McLeod, 2001, p.iix). This is a study where I investigate with three Maori women their experiences of the times in counselling when we have engaged in cultural identity conversations.

### ***Qualitative research – a way to do this research***

Being interested to explore my own practice and in particular aspects of the cultural conversations that had occurred between the women and me, I wondered how this might be accomplished. The nature of this inquiry - a pakeha counsellor investigating counselling conversations with Maori women - meant that the approach I decided upon would need to reflect the complexities and nuances of the counselling work and the research conversations. It meant such an approach would include the possibility of new kinds of conversations and knowledge.

Qualitative process studies are highly relevant to the interests of most practitioners, because they help to develop a sensitive understanding of the nuances of the therapeutic process. People who carry out this type of qualitative research also find that the actual experience of doing the research greatly contributes to their growth as therapists, (McLeod, 1999, p. 34).

In addition, I was interested to include within the research, my experiences and understandings of the research process alongside those of the women. Within the text I wished to represent the voices of all who participated and hence to offer the reader, the idea of “...multiple ways of knowing” (McLeod, 2001, p. 7). Thus a qualitative process seemed to best suit my hopes for and interest in this research.

This research enters into a spirit of exploration by questioning how cultural conversations in counselling have influenced the women’s construction of aspects of

the world. By engaging with, rather than reporting or observing these research conversations, I, too, am invited to consider how these particular cultural identity conversations have contributed to my construction of the world.

In approaching this study qualitatively, both in inquiry and in writing, I offer as Burman (1994) wrote "...[not] a seamless coherent text produced within one moment by a disembodied and disinterested author" (p. 131). Rather, this document is a representation of my personal experiences of the research: the joy, the pain and the reflections. These experiences are re-presented alongside the women's experiences and reflections. This document is, therefore, a re-presentation of the knowledge we have generated together and one that I hope might contribute to the development of my practice. All of this is woven together for the reader, but to apply to research, the claims White made of therapy, these representations:

do not adequately represent the disorderly process of therapy [and research] – the ups and downs of that adventure that we refer to as therapy [research].

Thus there is a simplicity reflected in these accounts that cannot be found in the work itself. (White, 1991, p. 22)

And so in presenting this document, like Lincoln (1997) I have given much thought to "what elements ...will become public knowledge" (p.52), and therefore what is made available for practitioners, colleagues and the women participants of this research.

### ***Early preparation***

At the end of 2006, as I completed my portfolio for the Master of Counselling programme, I reflected on the possibilities for study in 2007. During the year, I had been captured by developments in my counselling practice in regard to working with Maori women. I found myself returning to these counselling conversations and revisiting my understandings of them. This development and interest in my counselling prompted me to present a practice paper, "Working with the effects of sexual abuse and cultural difference" for other students on the counselling

programme. The practice paper was a course requirement that provided an opportunity to begin articulating this development in my work in a more intentional way.

As I gave further thought to this development, it became clearer to me how the conversations had offered the women a different position from which to view their lives. At the same time the responses by the women to the conversations, had offered encouragement to me as counsellor to continue to enquire about such areas of women's lives. I was curious to know how important or even significant these conversations were to the women with whom I met and what effects the conversations might have had for them. Thus, the general area of inquiry for my thesis was a little more visible to me and my supervisor.

### **Building a receiving context**

It was at this point that I started to introduce my interest to a small number of the Maori women who consulted me for counselling and where conversations about how they saw themselves as Maori women were a part. I explained to the women how these ideas had caught my attention and how I was interested to investigate them further at some stage in the future. My intention for mentioning my interest in these ideas to the women was to begin preparation for the possibility of such a project taking place in the future. At this stage I did not have a clearly articulated research proposal nor did I have ethical approval for engaging in research conversations with the women. I had hoped that indicating my general interest would be a reference point for introducing a project in the future. It was a step toward building a receiving context (Crocket, Kotzé, Flintoff, 2007) for a future study. In speaking about these ideas to the women, I held no expectation of a response or that they would inquire further. In some sense, speaking my ideas was to also hear myself speak of the possibility of this research and in speaking it out loud I was speaking it into existence (Davies, 1991). In terms of the way I intended to conduct this research, that is researching *with* the women and not *upon* them, speaking to the women at this point

was also to offer them the opportunity to consider whether the project would be of some value to them, to other women and to me.

### **The effects of speaking about this project**

In speaking my ideas to the women, women whose lives mattered to me, I experienced a sense of responsibility to continue exploring the experiences my counselling practice offered. It would not be easy for me to walk away from the potential this research offered now that I had spoken it out loud. It would not be easy to walk away from the women whose stories had offered this possibility, and I could not walk away from the ethical responsibility of working towards a more just counselling practice. Indeed, the very act of gently voicing the ideas to this small number of Maori women became a commitment from me to see the project to life. And it is only with reflection that I now appreciate the importance of this step both for my counselling and for the project. Two of the women I mentioned this project to said they would be interested to know more in the future. Their expression of interest added further to my commitment.

In speaking about the possibility of this project, I did so with tentativeness and caution. This allowed me time to consider and address the ethical issues involved of women agreeing to participate in the project, of possibly declining or of considering withdrawal from the project. It gave me time to reflect on the different aspects of the research and to act with care and responsibility at each stage. An effect of this caution for the process of the research was that it seemed to allow flexibility for the women and me to undertake the research in ways that suited us; there was some sense that we could “mak[e] it up as we [went] along” (Lincoln, 1997, p.52). Thereby the research could generate its own form and shape and be responsive to women’s interests as well as my own.

The next step, then, was formal enrolment and an application for ethical approval of the project.

## Selecting women participants

The intention for this research was to talk with up to three Maori women, selected from my counselling practice, about their experiences of the counselling where we had conversations about their cultural identity. The decision to select women who were currently engaged in counselling was arrived at after careful consideration and “an intimate knowledge of clients [that] inform[ed] [me] about the appropriateness of engaging with them in research” (Etherington, 2001, p.7). I was also drawing on more than twenty five years experience as a social worker and counsellor, much of which had been work with women and children. Alongside these considerations, the decision was informed by narrative ideas, especially those of creating the conditions into which people can speak. I had witnessed in counselling conversations the effects of people taking up positions of agency in their lives and, equally, contesting those positions that didn’t suit them, so I was hopeful the invitations extended to the three women to join the research would be received in spirit of these narrative ideas, as described below.

The women I had selected to join the research all had experience (through their own counselling with me) of the narrative counselling approach with which I preferred to engage. They were familiar with the processes of collaboration and co-researching as a way of bringing forward alternative possibilities for action in their lives (Epston, 1999; White, 1997, 2004b, 2007). Each of the women had also shown an interest in the counselling discussions where we talked about how they saw themselves as a Maori woman. When the invitations were sent out, two of the women had been engaged in counselling for longer than six months and one woman for more than three months. Each of the women were at a stage in the counselling where they were making a stand against the difficulties in their lives and making a stand for preferred ways of living and preferred identities (White, 1991, 2004b, 2007). This meant they were less vulnerable to unintentional persuasion by me and were able to consider the invitation into research, distinct from the counselling process. Each woman was engaged in individual counselling under the ACC scheme that offers counselling to

people who have been subject to experiences of sexual abuse. The women did not know of each others' participation in the research. However, each woman understood up to three women would be invited to join the project.

### ***Anticipating some effects of participation on the counselling relationship***

In preparing for this research, I was interested to anticipate the effects for the women, of receiving an invitation to participate in the research. A hope of mine was the women would find the ideas of the research captivating. However, as Manthei (2006) wrote when summarising the literature on the experiences of people seeking and engaging in counselling, "clients and their counsellors often disagree on what happens in counselling" (p.65). While I prefer to describe the differing experiences between client and counsellor as an indication of multiple realities or subjectivities (Monk, Winslade, Crocket & Epston, 1997; Winslade & Monk, 2001), my own experiences in counselling and social work also suggested there would be no certainty that the women would be captivated by the research.

### **The right to decline**

In preparing for the project, it was important to consider how the invitation might be received by the women, in particular the possible effects such an invitation might have for our existing counselling relationship (Etherington, 2001). A significant ethical dilemma raised by the invitation was how well the women would be positioned to agree to, or not to agree to participate in the project, given that we were engaged in a counselling relationship. Therefore, I was interested in working to ensure that to the best of my ability, if a woman wished to decline she could do so and understand that the ongoing counselling relationship would not be affected by her declining. It was important to me as a professional practitioner that the women understood it was their right to decline participating in the research and that I would respect this decision as both counsellor and researcher.

## **A dual relationship**

An agreement from the women to participate in the research raised different issues for the counselling relationship. It meant that each of the women and I would be engaging in a dual relationship, that of counsellor / client and researcher / participant. The New Zealand Association of Counsellors Code of Ethics requires counsellors to take full responsibility for “setting and monitoring boundaries” (2002, 5.11) between the counselling relationship with the client and any other relationships that might exist. Therefore it was important to pay attention to the possible effects this duality might produce, in order to “avoid the misuse of power” (Corey, Corey, & Callanan, 1998, p. 225). Corey, Corey and Callanan wrote about “[T]he need for therapists to be honest and self searching in determining the impact of their behaviour on clients” (p. 225). I was therefore, interested to ensure the enthusiasm and interest I held for the research did not obscure possible unhelpful or even negative consequences for the women in terms of the counselling or in any other aspects of their lives.

In considering the possible effects of a dual relationship, Bond (1993) suggested counsellors give consideration to “What maximizes the opportunities for everyone involved to implement their choices?” (p.133). The questions raised for me as researcher practitioner was how I could ensure the women could “implement their choice” if, after starting the research they decided they no longer wished to participate. How would the women understand that they could do so and be assured that the counselling, to the best of my ability, would not be influenced by a change in decision? How would I ensure the women could “implement their choice” if, after beginning the research they decided to stop the counselling with me? How would they understand that such a decision would not affect the research relationship or other possible counselling relationships we might have in the future? I wondered about these points in the context of the dual positions I held, and with a keen sense of the relations of power involved with both.

A further consideration which I understood as a result of engaging in this dual relationship, was the possible effect on the women’s personal circumstances of



participating in the research. I was mindful that each woman might need to make arrangements for their families or with their work to join me in the project, in addition to those they had already made for our counselling meetings. I was interested to work with these arrangements in support of minimal disruption to the women's lives.

### **The unexpected effect of an invitation**

As I considered who I might ask to join me in the research, I gave careful attention to what I knew of the each woman's life circumstances before extending the invitation (Etherington, 2001). I did not want the women to experience the research as an additional demand in their lives. It was then to my surprise, when, very cautiously, I invited one woman to participate and she enthusiastically agreed. I was interested in her enthusiasm and at the same time noticed almost immediately a shift in the relations of power in our counselling relationship. I experienced this shift as a move toward the woman experiencing further agency in her life. It seemed to me, the invitation to investigate experiences of counselling had positioned her differently. I wondered if in part she experienced the invitation as me taking her experiences of racism seriously. I also wondered if in the invitation she experienced being heard differently, being heard by me as both counsellor and researcher. Witnessing this experience supported my hopes for this research; that it might have effects for the women's lives (Etherington, 2001). Subsequent to this invitation there were times when there was reciprocity (Burman, 1994) to our counselling relationship that had its origins in the invitation.

I now present the steps I took to ensure the women made an informed decision about participating in the project. I include how I sought to ensure ongoing consent throughout the research and the options available to the women if there were changes to their initial decision. I include an account of what the women agreed to when consenting to participate in the research.

## ***Informed consent***

### **Informed consent - the invitation**

I invited three Maori women, Huia, Mihi and Nikki who were currently engaged in counselling with me, to join me in the research. Each woman received a letter of invitation (Appendices A, B, C) and an information sheet (Appendices D, E, F) that provided details of the activities I hoped the research would involve us in. Both the letter and the information sheet were written to the unique circumstances of each woman and drew attention to particular areas previously discussed in counselling and about which I was interested to investigate more. Along with the letter and information sheet, I also included an expression of interest form (Appendix H). This form asked the women to indicate whether they wished to participate; did not wish to participate, or required further information before making a decision to participate. With the latter option, I did not want to assume the questions the women might have about participating would be entirely covered by the information sheet, hence the importance of offering further opportunities to have the information and the ideas clarified prior to their making a decision. Clarification was ongoing and also occurred at the start of the research meetings as I introduced the ideas of the research to the women, during the meetings when the women asked, or as I offered this opportunity. Such clarification and inquiry was a process I also undertook in my counselling practice.

The invitation offered the women a number of ways to respond: they could speak with me directly at the next counselling time; telephone me outside of counselling time or indicate their response on the expression of interest sheet and mail it in the stamped addressed envelope I had supplied. The intention of providing alternative options for responding was to ensure the women were positioned to make an informed decision about their participation, and without pressure. It was also an attempt to counter the difficulties people can experience when requests and responses are made face to face. I understood these options were especially important if any of the women did not wish to participate. The various methods of response also meant

the women could take enough time to consider all the information, discuss it with others or myself if they wished, and if necessary ask further questions.

Each of the women replied to the invitation in person and told me their decision in a counselling meeting. One of the women, in addition to giving me a verbal response, also posted an expression of interest form indicating she would like to participate. All three women agreed to participate.

### **Informed consent - agreeing to participate; agreeing to the recording of meetings**

Following the woman's expression of interest to participate in the project, a consent form was signed (Appendix G). In signing, the woman was agreeing to: participate in a meeting of about one hour; to have the conversations audio taped, to have the tape transcribed by me, and to be sent a copy of the transcript. She was also consenting to participate in a second research meeting of up to an hour where the first transcript would be discussed and alterations made. The second meeting was also audio taped and transcribed and a copy given to the woman. The consent allowed material from the meetings to be available for presentation in this document and thus to be available to colleagues, counsellors and clients.

### **Informed consent during the research**

Fully informed consent is, of course, not possible when we embark on research that involves unfolding processes. We must therefore rely on 'process consent', ensuring at each stage that participants are still willing to be involved in the project and reminding them of their right to withdraw at any time. (Etherington, 2005, p. 305)

During the course of the research it was reasonable to expect that any one of the women might wish to withdraw their involvement. The question arose about how I would ensure this might be done, and to the best of my ability not influence the current counselling relationship in which we were engaged. Appreciating the importance of Etherington's comment, several copies of the withdrawal form

(Appendix I) and return stamped addressed envelopes were given to the women after they consented to the research. These forms offered the women the opportunity to either 1) withdraw from the research; 2) pause and discuss their participation with me before continuing further with the research, and 3) to end counselling with me and / or for me to provide names and contact details of other suitable counsellors. Again my intention was that the form would allow the women to change their initial decision about involvement without having to explain their decision to me or provide a face to face account. None of the three women changed their decision about participating; one woman sought clarification after receiving the first transcript. This clarification was to do with who read the transcript.

### **Confidentiality, privacy and anonymity considerations**

The principles of client confidentiality and privacy that have informed my counselling practice also inform this research project. However, in consenting to the research the women have given permission to include what they have said in this document.

The audio taped meetings were transcribed and typed by me and stored securely. Throughout this document the privacy of the women participants has been protected by the use of pseudonyms. Each woman chose the name by which she preferred to be known. Personal details about the women participants have been changed or omitted, to further ensure their privacy. During the course of the research discussions each woman, in speaking about her own life also spoke of and named other people. To protect the privacy of these people and from whom I do not have consent to include their information, I have changed, generalized, or omitted identifying details. Concerns and questions about confidentiality and privacy were discussed with the women during the course of the research.

I have discussed how the process of informed consent was undertaken in this project, I now discuss the issues involved for the women and me of occupying dual positions in the research. I offer the reader an understanding of the matters around positioning

that I held beginning this research and subsequent to the women's agreement to be involved.

### ***Matters to consider as researcher and counsellor***

#### **Could I inquire? What kind of inquiry?**

I was very keen to explore the ways I understood myself to be practising with some of the Maori women who consulted me, and I was equally keen to learn of their experiences of my practice. As I thought about the process of this investigation, it became clear such an exploration would require careful attention from me. The areas I identified included how I would go about asking the questions that could shed light on aspects of my practice that were perhaps of more interest to me, than the women. I considered whether it was possible for me, in the dual role of counsellor / researcher, to in fact ask these questions, or whether these questions would more easily be asked (and therefore more readily answered) by a person outside of the counselling relationship. A reason for this caution was to do with the uncertainty I held regarding my ability to adequately investigate these areas in ways that would provide a rigorous account of my practice (McLeod, 2001). With this in mind, I gave careful consideration to how I would ensure the questions I was interested to ask positioned the women to perhaps speak critically to their experiences of counselling rather than speak in ways to reassure me. To do this required a consideration of the kind of research relationship I was interested in having with the women. An inquiry approach that was familiar to me as a narrative counsellor was that of co-research and collaboration (Epston, 1999; White 1995, 1997, 2007). In narrative therapy, this approach involves a "shared responsibility for shaping the counselling conversation" (Monk, Winslade, Crocket & Epston, 1997, p. 54) and an ethic of joining with the women in an exploration of their experiences. These were the practices I was most interested in taking with me to the research and to the researcher / participant relationship with the women. They were ideas that "brought together the ... notion of research with the ... idea of the co-production of knowledge..." (Epston, 1999, p.142). Having an appreciation of co-research meant I could draw on these ideas as I shifted from position of counsellor to a position of researcher.

## **The position of client and participant**

When the women agreed to join me in the research project, they were offered a speaking position different from and in addition to the position offered within the counselling relationship. Up until this point the women and I had co-researched, in counselling, the effects of the sexual abuse on their lives and in so doing had generated alternative knowledge about aspects of their identities. I was now inviting the women to speak about the counselling from the position of a participant.

As research participants, the women were asked to speak about their experiences of the counselling process itself and in particular, to consider aspects of the counselling where we had talked about how they saw themselves as Maori women. This position asked the women to step away from speaking directly about the experiences which took them to counselling and instead, to speak about the times in counselling that inquired about aspects of their cultural identity. I hoped the participant position would offer women an opportunity to reflect upon their experiences of the cultural identity conversations in counselling and to consider whether this was useful or not or otherwise to their lives. I had hoped that, as in the position of client, the women would experience the position of participant as privileging of their knowledge about the counselling process. I hoped too this would be possible alongside the eagerness I had to know more about aspects of my own counselling practice.

## ***The research meetings begin***

This section presents the process of the research. It includes the steps taken from the first research meeting, through to the final meeting and discussion of the transcript. I describe the preparation I undertake as a counsellor before meeting people for counselling and how this preparation influenced the first meeting with Huia and informed subsequent research meetings. I present the struggle of occupying two positions as researcher and counsellor in the project, and the effects on Huia and me of these struggles. I offer the understandings gained from the first meeting.

## **The first meeting**

The time and date for the first research meeting was arranged with each woman at the conclusion of a counselling meeting. We began the meeting with a cup of tea, coffee or glass of water and a snack. While I do offer people a drink when they consult me for counselling, I wanted to distinguish the research meetings from the counselling meetings. The snack also became important sustenance as two of the meetings covered lunchtime. I viewed our shared refreshment as a small gesture toward creating a relaxed environment where the nervousness might fade and into which we could begin our research conversation. In all three first meetings, I wanted to acknowledge the generosity of their time and the extra arrangements and effort that went into participating in the research. I also wanted to acknowledge that beyond the counselling / research room, the woman's family was also making it possible for this meeting to happen. With this in mind, I gave each woman a bag of fruit to take home with them as *koha* in acknowledgment of what they were contributing to me.

The audio recorder was retested and the first research inquiry was underway.

## **Influence of the first interview on the research process**

The first interview with Huia was significant for the research. It was exciting for me as it signalled another significant step in the project. It held the possibility that new knowledge might be generated in our conversations. It also provided the opportunity to view the positions of researcher / counsellor and participant / client more clearly. To background how this opportunity offered clarity on these positions, I now offer the reader a view into the tasks I undertake in preparation for my work as counsellor. I also offer comment on the effects of this preparation for the research. This is a level of detail often overlooked in research reports, but given the theoretical position of this study, and my interest in how people are positioned to speak, and hear, and what they are positioned to say and hear, it is of critical relevance for this project.

## **The importance of preparation**

Preparation is an important aspect to how I work as a counsellor. It involves allocating time before meeting with a person to read over previous counselling notes, consider possible directions of interest for the person, review unattended to aspects that emerged in the previous meeting and remind myself of the tasks I have agreed to undertake, for example sourcing a book or photocopying an article. Ongoing counselling usually begins with the person and me engaging in a review of the previous counselling meeting, clarifying concerns and discussing further ideas and developments. When I meet a person for the first time I provide a copy of my professional disclosure statement and prepare to speak to the points in the brochure. I invite questions from the person consulting me as a way to ensure they have as much information as possible to make an informed decision about the counselling. All of these steps ensure I am well positioned to engage in the process of counselling and the woman consulting me is also positioned to determine whether the counselling with me suits her.

The preparation I undertook for each research meeting followed similar steps to that of the counselling preparation. For example I gave thought to earlier counselling conversations where we had included discussion about aspects of cultural identity; I reviewed previous counselling notes from which a research conversation might be initiated; I was prepared to provide further explanations about the research and to clarify any matter regarding the consent process and consent form. However I had not anticipated, the 'taken for granted' effect many years of experience had on me as a counsellor. I am suggesting the familiarity I had with preparing for counselling meetings obscured areas that were unfamiliar to me in the research process. I found that although I thought I had prepared adequately, the unfamiliarity (Crocket, 2004) I had with research meant some aspects of the preparation were out of my range of experience and knowledge and therefore were not considered. In particular, I had overlooked some aspects of preparing the women for their change in role from client to research participant, and this in spite of being a matter of which I was aware. That I had overlooked preparing Huia for her change in positions, was brought to my



attention as I reflected upon the completion of the first interview and as I listened to the recording of our conversation. The transcript highlighted this oversight further. It showed the questions were oriented toward appreciating aspects of Huia's experiences she brought to counselling, rather than toward her experiences of previous counselling conversations where we talked about aspects of her cultural identity. While the recordings and reflection made visible how Huia was not as prepared as I would have preferred, they also showed the difficulty *I* experienced stepping between these roles.

### **The struggle of occupying two positions – counsellor and researcher**

During the interview with Huia, I began to experience the difficulty of occupying the dual positions of counsellor and researcher. I experienced myself as not making the transition from counsellor to researcher as adequately as I had hoped. I noticed too, how I engaged in self talk around how well or not I was accomplishing the roles of both these positions. Weingarten, (2003) referred to this process as self witnessing. Also clearer to me was how during the process of the research conversations I was required at times to move between the two positions. This was especially so when Huia spoke of some painful and distressing experiences. I believed I had not prepared myself sufficiently prior to the meeting, to step from the counsellor position into the researcher position, nor had I prepared myself well enough to move between the two. And perhaps I had not known how and this research was the opportunity to learn.

It occurred to me that the experience of the dual positions, the self witnessing conversation I was engaged with, and attending to the process of the meeting, all competed for my attention. This meant that instead of appreciating the reflections of the woman's counselling experiences and what this offered the research project, I was focused on what I thought each position required me to do, how I was executing the positions, and what needed to be done differently. In this, I experienced myself as largely ineffectual as both counsellor and researcher and was left wondering whether

or not it was possible to make such shifts. It also had me wondering if it was at all possible for a counsellor to undertake research within their own practice.

The effect on the meeting process was reflected in how the opportunities offered by Huia, for exploration about aspects of her cultural identity were not taken up as readily by me. Therefore my inquiry of these times offered by Huia, was not as richly investigated in the way it would have been if this was a counselling conversation. As I write and reflect, it strikes me that this is not dissimilar to my experiences of learning and then practising narrative ideas.

These thoughts and experiences of the first meeting were however valuable. They provided the chance to consider the ways in which the narrative counselling skills I had been practising for some time could be called upon in the research. Although this might seem an obvious step to the reader, I think that in the excitement and nervousness of the first interview getting underway, these skills went into some kind of hibernation, and subsequent freezing. They slowly began to thaw as I began the preparation for the second meeting and drew on the understandings I had gained from the meeting with Huia.

### **Understandings gained from the first interview**

Reviewing the concerns about the first meeting drew attention to the differences between the questions I might ask as a counsellor and the questions I am interested to ask as a researcher of my own counselling practice. With the difference under the spotlight, I was able to explore in more detail the scope of the researcher position and appreciate its potential for the development of my counselling practice. Thus, the preparation for the meeting with Mihi and subsequently with Nikki focused on clearly identifying my research interest. My introductory discussion included: speaking about how my interest in cultural identity had developed; what I understood to be her contribution to my interest in the research; the ethical responsibility of me as counsellor to appreciate the effects of cultural marginalisation on the lives of Maori women; the woman's experiences of marginalisation, and reviewing the ideas and

experiences expressed in previous counselling discussions where we had talked about how she saw herself as a Maori woman. The effects of this preparation produced a different experience for me as researcher, one in which the enthusiasm for co-research and collaborative enquiry was evident. It seemed my narrative practice had emerged from hibernation and there was a way to proceed in our newly acquired positions.

I now present a brief overview of the steps from the first meeting with Huia to the last meeting with Nikki. This includes the sequencing of the research meetings, the transcribing and posting of these transcripts, and a note about a missing transcript.

### **The meetings, transcribing, the letter and posting**

Huia was the first woman to meet with me for a research conversation, followed by Mihi and then Nikki. At the conclusion of each of the first interviews, I transcribed the recorded meeting within two days and mostly within one day. The reason I decided to transcribe almost immediately, was in part my interest in revisiting the conversation, but more, that the experience of the meeting was more available to me. The meanings, for example of the pauses and the silences were more accessible to my memory and could be noted, than if I was to leave the transcribing to days beyond this time frame. With our conversation on paper, I began the process of constructing a letter, which was a witnessing response (White, 2004b, 2007) to the stories told by Huia, Mihi and Nikki during the meeting. I will discuss the purpose and intention of the letters in more detail at the conclusion of this section. Once the letter was written, I posted it, along with a copy of the transcript, to the woman. I allowed about two weeks between posting the transcript and letter, and inquiring about setting up a second meeting. This was to give the women time to read the letter, to consider the contents of the transcript and to reflect upon changes or additions to the transcript that she might wish to make.

Huia and Mihi each participated in a second research conversation, which again was recorded and transcribed. A second letter was written to both of the women, this time

as well as a witnessing response, thanking them for their participation and advising them of the final date by which they could withdraw from the project. Huia and Mihi continued to consent to have their stories included in this thesis.

Nikki, the third participant, joined the research for the first interview only. The context of Nikki's life meant she had many demands made on her time and this made the possibility of a second meeting difficult. As counsellor, appreciating the context of her life (Etherington, 2001), I did not wish to add further to the demands and did not think it fair or ethical that I pursue my interest in the research. I therefore decided not to ask Nikki to participate in a second meeting. I sent Nikki a letter thanking her for her participation and advising her of the cutoff date, should she decide to withdraw from the research. Nikki continued to agree to have the transcript of her meeting available for the research.

In all, five research meetings were undertaken with the three women.

### **A missing transcript**

Each of the women's transcripts was posted to the address they nominated and in each situation this was their home address. I used standard New Zealand Post. One envelope, containing a first transcript and letter did not reach one of the women. I did not learn about the missing transcript until she rang me to query that I had done what I said I would do – post the transcript. In my preparations, I had not anticipated the possibility of mail not reaching its destination. In the future I would consider alternative means of delivering the envelope to the women to ensure its receipt. In addition I might also phone to double check its arrival.

I now return to the letters I wrote following each meeting with the women.

### **The letter – a witnessing response**

Following each of the meetings with Huia, Mihi and Nikki, I wrote a letter which acknowledged the contribution they had made to the research and to my understanding of the counselling we had engaged in together previously. The

letter accompanied a copy of the transcript and the intention was for the women to read the two in conjunction. The letter highlighted aspects of the meeting that had caught my attention and about which I was keen to learn more. In this way the letter became an outsider witness response.

Within narrative therapy practice, outsider witness practices (White, 2004b, 2007; Weingarten 2003), work to support a sense of identity and community through engaging an audience. When identity is understood to be a public and social achievement (White, 2004b), having others who witness our lives contributes to who we understand ourselves to be. In narrative terms our lives thus become “more richly described” (White, 2004b, 2007). White offers a four-step process, called outsider witness practices. I now describe the witnessing response I offered the women in the study, aligning these responses with White’s steps.

In being witness to each women’s account of her experiences, I am not only listening to the story of her experiences, I am also engaging in a process that is shaping of how she experiences herself and of how I experience myself as researcher and counsellor. And so as a counsellor researching my own practice, it does not seem possible for me to hear women speak of the effects counselling had on stories of injustice and marginalisation and not be drawn to aspects of their expression. To notice particular words, phrases, and expressions is the first step White describes. It is also unlikely that in the listening, images will not be evoked for me, Whites second step. Similarly, it is not possible for me to hear stories of injustice and ignore the resonance with aspects of my own experiences of life as a counsellor researcher (the third step) and nor is it possible for me to witness the women’s stories and not be moved by them, White’s fourth step. In both identities, as counsellor and researcher, I am engaged as witness to each woman’s experience of counselling and the effect of this for her identity as a Maori woman. At the same time I am also witnessing the effects of our engagement in these conversations on how I see myself as a counsellor

practitioner and a counsellor researcher. This is what Weingarten refers to as witnessing of self and witnessing of other.

The letter I wrote to each woman was a witnessing response to the telling of her experiences of counselling in the research meetings. In writing the letter, I was guided by the White's (2004b) structure of outsider witness retellings. My hope was that in witnessing the stories women brought with them to the research meetings, and offering a retelling in the letter, they would experience aspects of their identities as more richly described; that in the letter might be "a foundation for [the women] to proceed to address predicaments and concerns" (White, 2007. p. 218).

## **Acknowledgement**

White's interest in witnessing as a "significant tradition of acknowledgment" (2004b, p. 53) also reflects how I hope to present the stories from the conversations with the three women and similarly how I hope to present the story of the project. While there are connections of common themes between the stories told by the women in the meetings, each woman's contribution to the project is acknowledged with a dedicated chapter entitled, Huia, Mihi and Nikki. The women have offered unique understandings about the way counselling has contributed to how they see themselves as Maori women and to how I might proceed with cultural identity conversations in the future. And so it is important these understandings are clearly available for the reader.

As I wrote the chapters on Huia, Mihi and Nikki I was captured at times with concern about chronology. I now address these thoughts in the following section. I conclude this chapter with a brief note on the context of this research.

## **Concerns about chronology**

The chapters titled Huia, Mihi and Nikki are my re-presentation of the five research meetings. In writing these chapters I have written about the ideas from the research

conversations that have captured my attention; that have resonated with aspects of both my professional and personal life and that have in some way moved me. As I have written my responses and understandings to the women's stories and woven them into the story of this research project, I have at times, altered the chronological order of the conversation. Deciding to alter this order has led me to wonder about the re presentation of this research. I have wondered about the ethics of re positioning conversation in order to highlight particular ideas or concepts of the research. I have wondered about the effects of the decisions I have made in the editing of our research conversations, for the women who might read their own chapters. I have wondered if the chronological ordering of conversational moments in the research is important to retain. I have wondered when I have made changes to the chronology of the research meeting in the final chapters, whether the intent and meaning of these conversations also change. If I can be clear, my intention for reordering the text is not to do with changing the 'facts', although it is possible this may unintentionally happen. Rather, my intention is to present to the reader the threads of the research conversations that are significant to me and that I will take with into future counselling conversations with other Maori women. I have not come to any fixed conclusion about the ethics of re positioning text. What I do know is the decisions I have made to reorder text has kept to the fore the spirit of learning which has been an important part of the research conversations for both the women and me. And as I consider and wrestle with these wonderings, I take heart from Ellis (1997), who wrote about the experience of her writing about the death of her partner Gene:

I began to concentrate more on being true to the feelings that seemed to apply in each situation that I described than to getting all the "facts" in the exact order and time sequence. More and more I moved away from trying make my tale a mirror representation of chronologically ordered events and toward telling a story, where the events and feeling cohered, where questions of meaning and interpretation were emphasized, and where readers could grasp the main points and feel some of what I felt (p. 128).

Like Ellis, at points during this research I have been compelled to write in an orderly fashion, to separate out the stories of the women's experiences of counselling and the

research from my own. It has been at these times that guidance from my supervisor has been vital. Such guidance has offered the opportunity to authorize myself, to have a voice that counts in this research.

### **A contextual note**

It is important to note, that while the ideas that helped shape the approach to this research drew on narrative ideas, the research process and the stories it tells are produced within discourse. This project is shaped by the stories that are available about research, about what counts as research, about what voices are represented and how these voices are represented within research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). On these terms my intention for this project is to “serve practice, both in the process of the research and in its product”, (Crocket, 2004, p. 64) and to contribute to the honouring of difference and promotion of healing in our society (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). I now introduce the reader to Huia, Mihi and Nikki’s stories.

### ***Introduction to chapters four, five and six***

The following three chapters offer an account of the five meetings with Huia, Mihi and Nikki. It is a significant task to present the values, beliefs and thoughts of the women who have entrusted the process of this research to me and to do it in a way that respects the generosity of their speaking. In re-presenting aspects of the conversations I have considered how this can be accomplished with care and responsibility. It matters to me that the voices of the women are heard as clearly as my own within the writing of this thesis and for this reason extracts of the discussion are included within the body of the document itself, in the style used by Hippolite Wright, (1998). Smith (1999, 2005), wrote of the ways western research has served to further colonize marginalised people. Thus, by presenting the discussions within the body of this document, either verbatim, as a theme or as an idea that links to a theoretical construct, my hope is to reduce the possibility of colonizing the women’s knowleges and their contribution to my ongoing practice as a counsellor.



## Chapter four: Huia

Huia and I stepped into our newly acquired participant / researcher positions for the first time in September 2007. It was the first meeting of the research project and the first of two meetings with Huia; we were about to embark on a relationship of a kind different to that of our counselling relationship.

### ***Introduction***

This chapter shows how Huia makes connections between aspects of her life and the lives of her ancestors and the wider socio-political context. Just as counselling is a political activity, so too is the practice of research. As Huia drew on her knowledge and understanding of the contexts that were influencing her life, so too did I draw on these in listening and responding to her. The areas Huia and I traversed in our conversation were: the effects of colonisation on the lives of her ancestors; the ongoing effects of colonisation for whanau; experiences of dissonance in education and schooling; naming and speaking out about injustices; knowledge and power - the practice of traditional Maori and western policing systems, and the effects of a counselling practice that works to include conversations about aspects of cultural identity.

### ***The effects of colonisation – historical and current***

Huia's engagement with a political analysis of her life was evident from the beginning of our discussion. She began with a story about the effects of a colonising history on the lives of her ancestors:

*I had just found out about the injustice ... The tribe had been blamed for the death of one master, which they didn't do. Soldiers, military, settlers and cavalry took over the township for a couple of weeks. They helped themselves to everything; food, water. They devastated crops and this was in the name of trying to find people, who weren't even there, but someone*

*had said they were in the township. They wiped out pa, numbers of people were killed. They raped. They had their way with people.*

Huia continued to offer the research a political understanding of the experiences of her extended whanau, when she identified further effects of colonisation:

*There were young girls who were selling themselves for food to the soldiers that had killed the people that had brought them up. I can see how that can turn their thinking around...*

As I listened to the pain with which Huia spoke of the how members of her whanau had been treated by the soldiers and settlers, and how this treatment changed their lives, I was saddened and troubled. I was saddened, that Huia's ancestors were subjected to terrible violence and abuse, and troubled to witness the effects and pain of that violence on Huia's life. A less visible trouble, but no less important, was that the account of history offered by Huia was one that had not been available to me in my education at school. As well I suspected from Huia's descriptions of her schooling - "*learning lullabies that made no sense, English lullabies...*" this account was not available to her either.

When Huia spoke of how many of her ancestors had been "*wiped out*", I wondered about the effects of this history to the sense she made of her life as a child growing up. I wondered, too about the significance to Huia's identity, of the colonising stories told in schools about her ancestral tribe. Huia explained:

*Then there is [the story of] how we are cannibals, that's what was said about the people. There were paintings of Maori sitting around a fire cooking eyes and eating them. It had been made up by the Traders who were greedy. The Traders bought the bodies, the heads, the remains, and the tribes were supplied with guns and tomahawks.*

This story of cannibalism was the one story available to Huia as a child as she made sense of the accounts of history she heard and the images (the painting) she saw growing up. As an adult, with knowledge and understanding of the processes and effects of colonisation, an alternative history of *“It had been made up by the Traders who were greedy”* became available to Huia. This alternative history, of her ancestors being subjected to violence by some of the Traders and Settlers, countered the colonised history of Huia’s childhood.

Huia’s words lead me to suggest that to work with her in counselling, in the area of sexuality, an important aspect of identity, without deconstructing the influences of historical discourses would be neglectful at the least and reproducing of the marginalising practices of colonisation of which Huia spoke. If we accept the narrative therapy idea that “people make sense of their lives through stories...”, (Freedman & Combs, 1996, p. 32) and “the ways in which we understand our lives are influenced by the broader stories of the culture in which we live” (Morgan, 2000, p.9), then exploring the effects of a colonising story, like cannibalism, to Huia’s identity, is central to any counselling we undertake.

As Huia continued to speak, I was struck by the willingness with which she shared very personal details of her whanau’s history. I understood this willingness was, in part an effort to help me as researcher appreciate how the history of her tribe may have been influential in the shaping of her own life. It struck me that it was important to Huia that I appreciate how family and social structures had been altered through generations, by the violence and taking over of the township in the 1860s. Huia explained:

*The chiefs were gone, one chief was arrested and taken away and hanged. The children would have been messed up, the ones that survived. It must have been very difficult to be a chief under all that [the invasion and*

*violence in the township] and tell people how to do things, why they should do things this way or that way.*

In speaking about the effects of colonisation, the land wars, the loss of leadership, and the violence perpetrated on her ancestors and on the descendants of those families now, Huia drew on the knowledge of other Maori and referred to a speech made by Maori Member of Parliament, Tariana Turia to the New Zealand Psychological Annual Conference. Turia (2000) had asked participants to consider the effects of colonisation as a trauma, and to give this trauma as much importance as that given to the trauma suffered by Jewish communities in the holocaust and the veterans of Vietnam. She spoke of "... the holocaust suffered by indigenous people including Maori as a result of colonial contact and behaviour". Huia stated:

*I can understand Tariana Turia when she called it something like a holocaust. It has effects on people.*

Huia noted the resonance of the ideas expressed in Turia's speech with her own life and at the same time she alerted me to the effects she had witnessed and had learnt about through conversations with whanau.

*Some [people / families] have a bad history of family violence and drinking... hurt done to children and no leadership.... They [whanau] were sent away to wealthy homes to grow up; children were sent into welfare and state care.*

Huia made explicit the links she saw between colonisation, family life and the difficulties family's can experience.

## ***Experiences of dissonance in school and education***

In further reference to the political context of her life, Huia spoke of the dissonance she experienced as a Maori person involved in predominantly Pakeha institutions and especially the dissonance she experienced in education.

*I had no life skills. I would have loved to have been told how to cook food or how to get it, to be taken to the supermarket, learnt how to shop. That would have been more helpful, instead of all this other stuff that I was told was important – I remember it all. Think of things I could have remembered instead of what I have stored in my mind, think of all the experiences I could have had – taken out to learn how to eat food off the land.*

Huia was drawing my attention to the unsuitability of aspects of a western influenced education system to her life. In particular, she was noting the lack of acknowledgement and encouragement of skills and qualities that would have contributed to the fostering of her identity as a Maori woman. Huia spoke further about the injustices she witnessed in her children's experiences of education. For example:

*My daughter missed out on being in the front row of the kapa haka group because there was a boy whose aunty made cakes and the principal liked cakes and you could see it working...So my daughter grew up knowing there's injustice, even though she knew she was good at kapa haka.*

I was struck by the words, "you could see it working" for a number of reasons. Firstly, they show Huia identifying how privilege operates to marginalise one of her children at school. Huia witnessed the principal acting in ways that privileged some students while at the same time, and seemingly without awareness, these same actions positioned other students at the margins. Secondly these words raise the matter of to whom is privilege most visible. Huia's statement clearly shows

that she has noticed the effects of privilege operating to disadvantage her child's life. And as such she calls my attention to the idea that the operation of privilege is frequently witnessed; it is not an unseen act in the lives of those who do not benefit.

Huia spoke of further experiences of dissonance where "*schooling had not done so well*" for her children. These were ideas voiced in a way that held Huia responsible for her children's success or otherwise and in a manner which would be described as internalising on the terms of narrative therapy (White, 1991, 2007). Narrative therapists understand that internalising language and the ideas it produces have a negative effect on peoples' lives as it locates the problem within the person. Frequently this can result in people seeing themselves as problematic (Freedman & Combs, 1996; Morgan, 2000). I see this effect playing out in the ideas available to Huia:

*I put a lot of hopes into the childrens' education but I didn't succeed in that due to some emotional blockage.*

Huia clearly held the view that the difficulties her children experienced with schooling were a reflection of her own identity and personal deficit, and perhaps a reflection of theirs too. As a narrative therapist I was particularly alert to the potential effects of such a way of speaking, a way that is commonly available in the psychological culture in which we live. White said, "[T]he habit of thought that constructs these internal understandings of people's lives is significantly a cultural phenomenon..." (2007, p.25). I would suggest then that counselling must therefore explore such cultural phenomenon and the dominant ideas that encouraged Huia to take up sole responsibility for her children's success or not in education. In particular, I would argue that counselling must offer conversations that work to deconstruct the discourses of education and ethnicity and the ideas available to Huia through these discourses, to make sense of her experiences of education. Without such deconstructive conversations there is a high risk that

Huia would continue to view herself as responsible for her children's success or otherwise in their education and would see herself as the problem.

### **Another explanation of educational dissonance**

Robinson and Howard-Hamilton's (2000) work on racial identity development, while referring to the American context, offers another explanation for the dissonance Huia experienced in respect of education:

From within the context of racial identity development, people appear to be culturally socialised toward developing an ethnocentric ideology. For instance, equality for all is taught by clergy, family, and educators, yet many students, regardless of race, admit they are largely ignorant of the contributions that people of colour have made to this nation and the world (p.7).

And relevant to Huia's educational experiences, Robinson and Howard-Hamilton referred to "school curriculum materials [that] are a reflection of what is valued throughout society" (p.7). Huia's experiences of education lead her to understand that predominantly pakeha practices, knowledge and ways of doing things were valued. She gave the example of, as a child at school learning, "*...lullabies that made no sense, English lullabies...*" as an illustration of how she arrived at this understanding.

Robinson and Howard-Hamilton's work, while it referred to education, I suggest has relevance for counselling practice. It raises the matter of whether the approaches, theories and methodologies of counselling in Aotearoa New Zealand are a reflection of what is valued in our society. If what is predominantly given value to Aotearoa New Zealand society are pakeha values, does this mean counsellor education and counselling practice will reflect predominantly pakeha values? This question is worth further thought and discussion so the particularities of counselling experience and practice can be appreciated. I do not wish to introduce the question to produce a polarisation in thinking rather I raise the question as a matter worthy of exploration in my own practice in the future.

To return to Huia's words and Robinson's idea I understand Huia to be alerting me to the difficulty of living in a society that values predominantly pakeha beliefs, practices and knowledge. Huia has experienced this valuing as having the effect of marginalising of her own identity and experience and those of her children. I understand the very act of Huia voicing her experiences of dissonance in education to me, as an acknowledgment of how I, as a counsellor, have given value to aspects of her identity and experiences as a Maori woman.

### ***How it is possible to speak about injustices***

As Huia spoke about some very personal aspects of her history and in particular the injustices suffered by her tribe and the resulting long term effects for families / whanau of the area, I was struck by how she was able to talk about this with me, a person with a very different cultural history. I was interested to find out more:

*Would you talk with another Maori person this way?*

*In what circumstances would you talk with a Maori person this way?*

*Would you talk with other pakeha people this way and in what circumstances?*

Huia responded:

*I probably wouldn't have the same opportunity to [talk with another Maori person]. I'm guessing they might start bringing in their own thoughts on their culture which might be different to me. [A Maori counsellor] might start talking about their own cultural ideas, which wouldn't help me.*

Huia's response alerts me to the assumption connected with cultural knowledge, that people of the same ethnicity will share the same ideas, values and understandings. This is not Huia's experience. Sue & Sue (1990) who wrote of the American counselling context, said the preferences of those seeking counselling "...may really be a function of the culture / racial identity of the



minority person (within-group differences) rather than of race or ethnicity per se” (p. 93). Huia continued:

*A Maori counsellor would have to tell me where they came from, where they lived, where their mother and father came from, where their grandmother and grandfather came from and I might learn mine was there too. And the two might not have got on very well and that might affect me.*

Huia drew my attention to the complexity of whanau connections by offering an alternative account of these relationships. Again the research conversation highlights the importance of context, noting whanau connections may be appreciated in some contexts while disconnecting people in other contexts. Huia’s statement orients me to be attentive to assumptions about cultural knowledge and to their effects. I understood this to be an important matter to Huia and connected to the potential of identifying offenders. She emphasised:

*Things like big families where there is sexual abuse, I wouldn’t be able to talk to a Maori person like that ...because the person I might be talking about might be a relation of theirs. Some people do know where their relation was. And if I was to mention that person from an area, they would know exactly who I was talking about. So I wouldn’t.*

I was struck by the care Huia had given to the effects of speaking, for herself as speaker and for the listener. I understood Huia to be saying that in a counselling relationship with a Maori person, she would have to consider her whanau connections and relationships to the Maori counsellor very carefully. And that she would do this before proceeding with counselling.

In considering how it was possible for Huia to speak about such details with me, I drew on Smith’s (1999) concept of a decolonising methodology which embodies “... a wider framework of self-determination, decolonisation and social

justice” (p.4). I would suggest that in as much as Huia identified the operation of colonising practices on the lives of her ancestors and now on her own life, she might have identified a decolonising methodology in the counselling we had undertaken over a number of months prior to the research. And, perhaps, an effect of this decolonising methodology was that it supported Huia in bringing to my attention, the pain of her ancestors and the reverberations for subsequent generations.

The counselling approach that supported Huia in speaking to me about the serious acts of marginalisation in her history privileged her voice. This meant Huia’s account of the acts of colonisation and their effects were given space and opportunity to be spoken. There was no intentional attempt to minimise the effects of such practices to Huia’s life or to prevent them from being voiced at the outset. The counselling offered an opportunity to be heard in particular ways, ways centred Huia’s stories and that at the same time teased apart, deconstructed (White, 1991) the ideas and practices that informed these stories.

An additional quality of the counselling approach was the creation of the conditions for Huia to speak about the injustices on her life. This involved paying attention to those circumstances which have restrained Huia’s voice being heard - for example, dominant discursive practices of white invisibility and pakeha privilege. Huia’s decision to take up the opportunity to speak about aspects of her life did not occur randomly. Rather it was, in part, the result of a process of collaborative inquiry into the stories Huia held about her life and the effect these stories had for her identity that brought forward a space into which Huia could speak as she did.

### ***An outsider witness response***

The curiosity I held for the counselling, and, in particular, the times when we had talked about experiences that influenced how Huia saw herself as a Maori woman, led me to enquire further. Huia replied:

*I have found it useful, [the research meeting] because sometimes I will tell you things that I wouldn't tell other people. For a start, they may not find it interesting and they may judge me about it. But I think all the experiences of my life are important, they have made me who I am.*

I was struck by this comment for a number of reasons. Firstly, I was drawn to Huia's statement of speaking about aspects of her life in ways that she would not speak with others. I felt enormously privileged to be invited into this position of witnessing what others had not yet witnessed. It was a reminder to me to treat each moment of speaking with care. Huia's story connected me with other women I have met in counselling and for whom I have been one of the first people to witness their pain, their struggles and the stands they have made for justice in their lives. I was reminded too, of the courage and determination it can take for women to take such a step and I wondered in what other ways Huia had been supported to speak out about the injustices of her life.

Secondly, I was drawn to, *"they may not find it interesting and they may judge me about it,"* for it connected strongly to the kind of ethical practice I am interested in working for as a counsellor. The absent but implicit (White, 2000) statement I understood to be held within Huia's comment was that she could depend on me to hear her stories with the significance they deserved and at the same time resist any invitation to judge her story or her experiences of life. It was indeed an honour to have the ethical principles of "respect for individual and cultural differences" and "the diversity of human experience" (NZAC 4.1) acknowledged in my counselling practice. It meant the ideas and ways of practising I strive for and that are important to me, are also important and had meaning in the lives of others.

And thirdly, I was struck by Huia speaking about the ways in which her life experiences have contributed to making her who she is today. This statement

embodies the steps of strength and courage I have witnessed Huia taking life in her life. In witnessing these of steps of courage, I also hold the experiences of marginalisation to which Huia has been subject. I do not lose sight of the marginalisation Huia has been subject to as a person who is Maori, who is a woman and who is a mother. I remember that when she speaks to give an account of who she is today, she is drawing on all of these experiences.

### ***Holding hope***

As I have indicated, Huia's interest in education was a feature of the discussions at both interviews and it provided rich territory for exploration. Huia spoke of how the education she had received as a child had generally been unhelpful in preparing her for life as a mother and in undertaking household tasks and responsibilities. She also said her schooling had offered little sense of herself as a young Maori, largely reflecting dominant ideas valued by European educational traditions. In reflecting upon her own schooling, Huia held the hope for a different kind of education for her own children, one that would privilege their identity as Maori and where opportunities for enriching this identity would be available throughout their learning.

### ***A newspaper article – news of difference***

During the counselling I had offered Huia a newspaper article reporting on Bishop's (2007) research into schooling and Maori children. I did this in response to Huia's concern for her children's education and how she said that it was "not doing so well for them". I held a number of intentions for offering the article. Firstly, I intended to provide an alternative explanation of the educational experiences of Maori children who did not do so well to the one Huia carried; that is, that it was because of her own emotional deficits. Secondly, I hoped that Bishop's findings and explanations maybe of assistance to the meaning Huia and her children might make of their schooling experience. Thirdly, I considered that the article may offer an alternative position from which Huia and her whanau might consider aspects of their identity as Maori. The account offered within the

article had the potential to separate Huia from a sense of wrong doing as a parent, as well as to provide a wider context within which to place her concerns for her children and their schooling. It was as if through the article, Bishop was witness to Huia's experiences of education.

In deciding to offer the article to Huia I drew on my experiences as a counsellor and the availability, through this work, of the many stories and "significant events that stand outside dominant storylines" (White, 2007. p. 82). I believed Bishop's findings stood outside the dominant storylines currently available to Huia about her education, and was curious to know what sense Huia would make of the article. It was important to me that Huia made the judgment regarding the articles relevance to her experiences; I did not intend to take up a position of persuasion and in doing so centre my voice and my knowledge. White (2007) says of this therapeutic position:

Conversations that highlight unique outcomes support a decentered therapist participation, which privileges the authorship of the people seeking consultation (p.220)

The article captured Huia's attention, as she explained in the research meeting:

*When we talked about alternative explanations for my concerns like the research by Russell Bishop, it was a shift of blame ... It opened up that whole thing that there might be something apart from me that could be to blame. From your perspective, well shall I say an outsider's perspective ... It's a bigger issue ... It was happening with other people's kids not just mine and there was an explanation for that.*

I was struck by Huia's statement, "*from your perspective ... an outsider's perspective*" as it demonstrated to me the benefit of offering alternative perspectives within counselling, to the process of making sense of experiences in life. This is especially so when such experiences lay outside the dominantly constructed realities. In offering the article I was offering an opportunity to bring

into sight what was previously obscured. Hare-Mustin (1994) wrote:

[D]iscourses bring certain phenomena into sight and obscure other phenomena. The ways most people in a society hold, talk about, and act on a common, shared viewpoint are part of and sustain the prevailing discourses (p. 20).

Huia's identification of the blame was striking, as it named the operation of a discourse and suggested the ways this discourse was sustained. I was keen to learn more. I was curious to know what it meant to Huia that she no longer felt to blame for some of the experiences her children had been through in their schooling, and what it meant to her to learn that unhelpful school experiences were also happening to other people's children. She told me:

*My problems have become less internalised.*

I inquired:

*Less internalised? Can you tell me what that means to you?*

*It means before my problems used to be all within me and nowhere else, now through that little shift of blame and seeing things from an outsiders view, I can see it just wasn't me to blame.*

Huia's response was striking for me to hear. As a narrative practitioner, striving to create the conditions for problems to be externalised, and people's identities separated from the effects of problems, these words were a joy to my ear! I had not previously heard Huia speak about the concept of internalising and was intrigued she had decided this word best fitted her experience of the "shift of blame". Huia's enthusiasm for having an alternative way to speak about the experiences of schooling and one that did not locate the blame with her was obvious. She continued:

*There was something on Radio New Zealand that a new curriculum is coming out in a couple of years and it is going to cost millions ... I heard one of the people say “There isn’t enough money to cope with all the problems Maori and Polynesians have with the curriculum; we are not going to spend that. So we are not going to look at these issues of what needs to go into the curriculum to fix things for them, the minorities.” They obviously haven’t heard of the Treaty! ... [I]t’s not going to do anything, because they haven’t addressed the concerns of the tangata whenua.*

Here, Huia resisted the invitation to internalise the problems experienced by many Maori in their schooling, instead she called upon the authority of the Treaty of Waitangi to refuse the claims made by speakers, offering a political analysis of the radio interview. I was interested to know if there were any other effects of the shift of blame as these would assist Huia to further separate from the identity conclusions of bad parent previously available to her on the terms she had been offered.

*[T]he problem is not in me. A lot of people probably still feel it’s them because that is what is pushed across to us. And especially if you have a partner like I have had, where I’ve been the main carer, so that if anything goes on [difficulties], it’s me [to blame] ...I’d never have the chance to feel good about what I was doing, very rarely.*

Again, I was taken with the way Huia had noticed the influence of dominant discourses on her life and on the lives of her whanau; discourses that I would call mother blaming, individual responsibility and the problems with Maori. Naming and deconstructing the “subjugating dominant discourses” (Freedman & Combs, 1996, p. 68) which influence a person’s life is important to both the counselling and research process because, as Freedman and Combs note, “Discourses powerfully shape a person’s choices about what life events can be storied and

how they should be storied” (p. 43). They go on to say:

When people, through the “unmasking” process of relating problems to societal discourses, see their local problems as particular instances of political problems in the larger society, they become motivated to deal with them differently (p. 68).

Huia was now positioned to act differently in her life. I was equally struck by the way Huia identified the intentionality with which the discourses operated: “*that is what is pushed across to us*”. Again Huia refused to internalise the blame. Instead she made the effects of the discourses, and her experience of them, visible for me to appreciate.

There was yet another thread to Huia’s statement which also caught my attention. This was the reference to an “us” in the experience of blame. Huia’s enthusiasm for these ideas and my curiosity to understand the effects of blame even more took us down a path where Huia made the claim that she was not alone in this experience. A community of support was now available to Huia to resist the marginalising practices she had been subject to in education.

As a counsellor, appreciating that the process of deconstruction can have effects for identity claims beyond the immediate area of discussion, it was not surprising to me that Huia’s determination to refuse blame returned us to one of the concerns reported in Bishop’s research.

*In the article, and you emphasised the bit where he said children are failing because they are not being called their proper name. They are called wrongly all the time. They might be used to being called their name correctly and then they feel dumb. So my name is Huia, but if someone calls me Hui I would feel stupid. It’s as if they are not recognising where I come from, my whole background. My father gave me this name and he called me that with love and all that’s thrown out the window by someone not being able to pronounce my name.*



I was drawn to Huia's comments about the effect to her identity of her name being incorrectly pronounced. It struck me that this was a moment when the meaning of whanau connections was visible and clearly valued by Huia as she spoke about her name being gifted to her by her father. I was also struck by Huia's acknowledgment of the contribution the article and my offering the article had made to her taking such a position on the effects to her identity of incorrect pronunciation. The acknowledgment was very a significant gesture to the counselling Huia and I had undertaken together, and to how I understood myself to be practicing in this relationship and in counselling relationships with other women. The researching process with Huia was offering me unique moments of appreciation of my work.

### ***A counselling practice***

The research conversation Huia and I were engaged with offered a wonderful testament to the inclusion in counselling of inquiry into aspects of cultural identity. In saying this I am not advocating a slice of a counselling session be given over to questions on people's cultural identity. Rather I am advocating for an approach that includes an appreciation of both the strength and the tentativeness with which many Maori women hold onto their identity. And I am advocating for an approach that appreciates both the subtlety and the force of marginalising discursive practices to the lives of many Maori women.

For Foucault, knowledge, the particular common-sense view of the world prevailing in a culture at any one time, is intimately bound up with power. Any version of an event brings with it the potential for social practices, for acting in one way rather than another, and for marginalizing alternative ways of acting. (Burr, 2003, p. 68)

On these terms - that any version of an event brings with it the potential for a socially just practice and for marginalising ways of acting – the position I took in the counselling with Huia had effects for her identity and her life. I understood my responses to Huia's stories would be shaping of her identity. I understood this

shaping of identity was influenced by what I decided to inquire further about in Huia's words, what I unintentionally overlooked in her words, and the language I used in responding. Huia spoke about the ways my response to her had influenced how she saw herself.

*[I]t's been healing to me. You might ask me a question and that would make me think harder or work something out, so it's healing for me. It is important for me to carry on with trying to talk.*

I inquired:

*Can you think of a time when this has happened, a question or a comment that has got you thinking?*

*Even if you just mention something or say, "that must have been hard for you". Or you mention something I have never thought about before and I've never seen it through someone else's eyes and they see it has been hard for me. Or that you attach it some other experience I've had and joined them together.*

When Huia said, "You might ask me a question and that would make me think harder or work something out" I understood that she had appreciated the quality of the inquiry we had engaged in together rather than any specific piece of cultural knowledge or teaching I had brought to the counselling. And that it was the particular quality of the inquiry that had taken her into new territories of thinking.

Huia spoke about the importance to her of the counselling in witnessing the pain of her stories, while at the same time having these stories appreciated in a way that was acknowledging of her efforts to speak them. She spoke about the meaning to her of the counselling connecting together threads of her life and the

way this process brought forward different understandings for her. When Huia said "... you attach it to some other experience I've had and joined them together" she offered an account of how a narrative practice works to link together over time, experiences that might otherwise remain separated. Huia noticed a narrative coherence to the stories she had spoken about in counselling. Weingarten (2003) wrote of this:

[Narrative coherence], then, is another attribute of compassionate witnessing. It assists in the development of a coherent narrative for those who take the risk to bridge the pain and suffering caused by violence and violation. (p. 235)

Huia continued:

*I've found coming here really good. It's been so much about me that I have forgotten your names – I've forgotten your name and Dave's name (Dave is the counsellor Huia is seeing in respect of another dimension of her life). It's been more about me and my family which has been good. It wouldn't have accomplished so much if it had been give and take, which I thought counselling was. It's been good.*

As a counsellor listening to Huia's words, "it's been so much about me", I am reminded of the ways of practising that are important to me. I have intentionally sought to listen to Huia's stories with compassion, interest and without judgment, and at the same time sought to de-centre my own ideas, experiences and knowledge in that listening. By "... situate[ing] ourselves on the boundary of knowing and not knowing, we position ourselves within the therapeutic relationship in a unique way" (Bird, 2000. p. 91). In my counselling work with Huia, the boundary Bird referred to was a place of considered action, a place of reflection on what had been left unsaid, a place of thought for stories that had not been inquired about, a place of "seeking out and listening to marginalised voices" (Bird, 2000, p. 127) a place of drawing on the resources of others to offer Huia and a place of compassionate witnessing (Weingarten, 2003).

*Being able to sit here and talk is helping me a lot. It's been very helpful talking about all these things ... Oh I just know counselling is good because it gets me to think where I want to be. It's been really important for me.*

I was very moved by Huia's words, "it gets me to think where I want to be". They spoke to me of the hopes Huia held for her future and the futures of her children and grandchildren. They spoke of the delight Huia experienced (and I witnessed) as she stepped into an alternative story of her life and they also spoke to me about the ways I had engaged with Huia in the therapeutic relationship. Bird (2000) suggested that "the professional self is not a detached self" (p. 126). The relationship Huia and I had engaged with from the beginning of counselling was never detached. It was however professional. It was professional in that I was interested in negotiating the relationship throughout the process of the counselling and the research; I was interested in attending to aspects of Huia's identity as a Maori woman from the outset; I sought to appreciate and explore the effects of marginalisation on Huia's life and I respected when these territories were unavailable or not ready for discussion. I was also interested in an alternative approach to working with the effects of sexual abuse. This approach worked to avoid emphasising what Kamsler (1990) noted as a predominant theme in literature and counselling practice, that of psychological damage. The approach I had engaged in with Huia, was an approach she said had worked for her in reclaiming aspects of her identity that had been marginalised.

### ***Chapter summary***

From Huia I learned the significance of a counselling practice that inquires about aspects of cultural identity. I appreciated the significance to Huia of locating any discussion about identity within a social and political context. And that these contexts included exploration of both historical and current events. I also learned

from Huia the significance of my witnessing her pain and appreciating her steps of courage on how she saw herself as a Maori woman.

## **Chapter five: Mihi**

### ***The context of our meeting***

The school holidays had started and Mihi offered to hold the first research meeting at her home. I had previously suggested the meeting could take place wherever it suited her, acknowledging that as a sole parent, she juggled work, involvement in school and Kohanga Reo, and commitments to her church, her community and herself. I did not want Mihi to experience her participation in the research as a pressure in her life, and so I accepted the invitation to meet at her place. In accepting Mihi's invitation I was guided, too, by Sue and Sue (1990): "Rather than demanding the client adapt to the counsellor's culture, it may be better for the counsellor to adjust to and work within the client's culture" (p. 28).

Having already met with Huia and having reviewed aspects of the researching process, I had the benefit of meeting Mihi with a clearer sense of my position as researcher. I introduced the history of my interest in the research and spoke of how Mihi's initial interest and her willingness to participate in the project encouraged me to continue to explore these ideas further. I could not have predicted what was about to unfold in the research conversation.

### ***Witnessing the conversation with Mihi***

In order to illustrate how powerfully influencing our conversation was to my understanding as a pakeha counsellor enquiring about cultural identity within counselling conversations, I include here the letter I wrote to Mihi after our first meeting in October 2007. The letter captures aspects of the quality and the range of our discussion and also presents to the reader something of the immediacy of my response to the conversation with Mihi. In writing the letter I called on the narrative practice of outsider witnessing (White, 2004b, 2007), described in Chapter Three. In this outsider witnessing, I as researcher became the audience for Mihi's telling of her experiences of counselling. The letter I then wrote to Mihi was a retelling of those aspects of the original telling that I was drawn to.

## **The letter**

*Kia ora Mihi,*

*Thank you very much for taking the time to join me in this research project. It was a privilege for me to sit with you and your tamariki, in your home, and hear your understandings of the counselling relationship we have created together and how this has contributed to the sense you have of yourself as a Maori woman. It is a meeting that has stayed with me as I have met with other Maori women in counselling and has continued to support my practice.*

*To witness you saying, “But when I started to get an understanding, I realised my journey had been enriched in more ways, ... if you give people the opportunity, it was like a rekindling of something”, was very moving for me. In this, I understand you to be telling me that you have caught sight of something very, very important to you - how you see yourself as a Maori woman.*

*Mihi, I was really struck when you said, “...it was like a rekindling of something”. I had images of you, with your whanau and friends gathering together re-igniting the many ways you see yourself as a*

*Maori woman. I could imagine you all, sparking off one another and reviving aspects of your life that have been smoldering in the coals. Your speaking of a 'rekindling' struck a chord with me as I remembered how my mother made many quiet efforts to bring her cultural history and identity alive for me when I was growing up. I appreciate, in your speaking, how I have been reminded of these times with my mother. Thank you for this opportunity to reconnect with her.*

*As I left your house, I was holding a mixture of hope and sadness. The sadness I held was that in previous counselling experiences, counselling has been a place where there has been no regard of you as a Maori woman. I also held sadness that dominant ideas and practices have trained you into believing, "My identity was always irrelevant" in counselling and other places, and this has meant putting aside aspects of your Maori identity in the many places where you live and work. I was also saddened to hear you speak of de-sensitising yourself to the dominant ideas you are required to live within, as a means of living without being sick. For example you told me how you were brought up to take your shoes off when entering another person's house; it is something you do to show respect. And you told me that you have "had to change because I do not want to feel bad" because some people*



*entering your house do not respect your values of taking shoes off.*

*The hope I hold is in listening to you speak about how you are standing as a Maori woman, "...I am Maori; there are so many dimensions of me.*

*I am enriched by both Maori and Pakeha cultural things ...". I also hold hope in how you are now speaking about aspects of your identity in the counselling time, "To talk about that and leave identity out wouldn't be right. I didn't know that either, I thought it could be separated ...". And I hold hope in how in this speaking you are noticing some effects in your day to day life: "I've been able to make sense of our conversations about church ... only because identity has been brought in...".*

*I have been wondering in the days since we met, if there might be people who you think would stand alongside you in reclaiming your identity as a Maori woman. Perhaps people in your whanau, or Te Kohanga Reo; maybe old school friends or work colleagues; maybe church friends and support people? And who do you think might have known, or had a hunch, that you would be saying ,*

**"I am Mihi. I am Maori"?**

*Mihi, I was very struck by the generosity you showed me when you said to me, "It requires a giant leap of faith on your part to go there". It is a phrase that has come to mind as I have transcribed our meeting and continued to think on all that we talked about and it has been there when I have met with Maori women for counselling. I have been thinking of this 'leap of faith', on my part, more as a responsibility I have as a pakeha counsellor in working with Maori women. If I did not take this 'leap of faith', I would not be practicing in a way that I believe is ethical and might even reproduce some of the previous counselling experiences you have spoken about with me. Do you have any thoughts on this; would you say that counselling has an ethical responsibility to inquire about a person's cultural identity, that culture is a relevant aspect of counselling?*

*Mihi you told me "... and when this research came up I really did want to participate in it because then it would give me more understanding of 'well why are you doing this?'" I am curious about what you might now understand about why I am doing this – asking the sorts of questions that connect to cultural identity? Are there questions you would still like to ask about this, Mihi? I am interested to know what they might be. What advice would you give me in terms of thinking about working with*

*other Maori women who might also wonder “why you are doing this”? Do you think there might ways I could best approach talking about this with other Maori women in counselling, would you have any suggestions?*

*Mihi you will recall me speaking about my supervisor reading the transcript. She is very interested in some of the things you have spoken about too. Would it be okay to ask some of the questions she has?*

*Kathie was curious about what effect it might have had for you that I was interested and committed in taking such a leap of faith? She is interested in appreciating your views on whether you think it also takes a leap of faith for women to go to counselling? And if so, what reciprocal leap of faith might be expected from counsellors, particularly for a pakeha counsellor meeting with a Maori woman?*

*I have learned a lot from us speaking together and what has stayed with me in the days since we met, are your words:*

**“...If we are talking about sexual relations, that was very much influenced by my grandmother in a Maori cultural context. To talk about that and leave identity out wouldn’t be right. I didn’t know that either, I thought it could be separated because I have [in the past], but they**

can't; but going through that experience is an important piece."

*Your words have guided me when I have met with other Maori women in counselling and when I have been unsure about asking questions to do with cultural identity. I have remembered your words and been supported by them. I have held onto the idea that even though this may be a territory that is not easy to navigate, it "is an important piece."*

*I appreciate there is a lot to consider in this letter and in reading the transcript, so I invite you to pick up those pieces that interest you and put to the side the pieces that do not; I am very interested in your ideas and responses. I enclose a copy of the transcript for you to read.*

*Thank you again, and I look forward to meeting with you soon.*

*Ka kite ano*

*Jane Harkness*

## ***Further to the letter and back to the transcript***

### **Culture Shock – an introduction to discourse**

I have not previously experienced my acknowledgement and interest in another's culture and identity, as culture shock. "Culture shock" was the term Mihi used to account for the "strangeness" of experiencing her culture and identity included and inquired about within the counselling discussions we had engaged in together. Mihi had previously experienced counselling where her cultural identity was taken to be irrelevant. My initial response to the description, "culture shock" was that I had misheard Mihi or perhaps that I had misunderstood what she had said or that perhaps I had in some way acted with disrespect. I found myself quickly checking my memory banks of our previous counselling meetings for evidence of the ways I might have acted, or words I might have said to cause Mihi offence. Mihi explained the development of what she called culture shock:

*The reason why I became interested in this [research] was because I would never actually care to share anything about my identity, always viewing it as irrelevant, particularly to a pakeha counsellor. I think, they are not part of it [Maori culture], so it's irrelevant. I also thought in some parts I could actually see your interest, I could see your interest and say "Well why are you going there [with the conversation]". I would be thinking that at times and then sometimes I thought, "I am not interested in that", but it's done me the world of good. It's really quite interesting because it wasn't the space. When I do certain things in my life it doesn't include my Maori identity. So why you were trying to, that just baffled me.*

I was unprepared to hear Mihi speak of her identity as a Maori woman as something she did not share in the different contexts of her life, but especially in the counselling context. It drew my attention to assumptions I had made about the counselling relationship and had me wondering why I had not given adequate thought to, and preparation for, the possibility of Mihi regarding her identity as irrelevant. Perhaps

this was evidence of how invisible the dominant discourses are that operate in my life as a pakeha person. Sue and Sue (1990) offered a possible explanation for Mihi's caution.

[T]he culturally different client is likely to approach the counsellor with trepidation: What makes you any different from all the Whites out there who have oppressed me? What makes you immune from inheriting the racial biases of your forebears? (p. 71).

I was saddened to hear Mihi had been subjected to and continued to be subjected to ideas and practices that privileged predominantly pakeha values. I was furthered saddened to hear Mihi say that the effect of this privileging was that she cast her Maori identity to the side.

### **The effect of universality**

Such an effect drew my attention to the largely dominant discursive practices of universality to which Mihi was subject. Sue and Sue (2008) wrote about the ideas of cultural universality and cultural relativism and the effect these two different positions have on the ways counsellors work. The former refers to the position taken by some counsellors and counselling approaches that "...difficulties appear in all cultures ... that Western concepts of normality and abnormality can be considered universal and equally applicable across cultures" (p. 31). The focus then becomes one of addressing difficulties without reference to the cultural context. The latter, cultural relativism, acknowledges the cultural context within which difficulties are experienced. Therefore any solutions to these difficulties would require an appreciation of the cultural values that were shaping of the problems. Mihi was clearly saying that in previous counselling and in other areas of her life, she had been subject to experiences of cultural universality, to not having aspects of her cultural identity seen as significant. To Mihi, these experiences have meant there has been a lack of space to be different, to be Maori. These experiences also had her believing that as I, Jane, was not part of Maori culture, I had no need or interest in appreciating aspects of her culture. With Mihi drawing my attention to the effects of universality

on her own life, I am more alert to the possibility of other Maori women bringing this experience with them to counselling.

### Seeing my interest

Alongside these concerning experiences, Mihi also spoke about ideas that had me curious to learn more about the counselling relationship we had negotiated together. Mihi spoke of “seeing my interest”, but also of wondering why I was interested. She explained this further to me:

*[I was thinking] “What’s going on here, we don’t have these kinds of conversations” ... It just didn’t seem to fit with anything I’ve ever encountered before. My identity was always irrelevant. It wasn’t relevant to that setting [the counselling], so I didn’t really know how to [respond] I just thought [to myself], “Answer the questions” [I]t was very interesting and when this research came up I really did want to participate in it because then it would give me an understanding of, “well why are you doing this”. You get used to the way you are doing things, you get used to certain settings. **It was very strange, that was a culture shock!** (Mihi’s emphasis)*

I was interested to learn that Mihi did not know how to respond to my enquiries about her identity and her experiences of marginalisation, and that she took up the research to understand and make sense of what I was doing. It was a simple step for me to contemplate that in counselling I had not provided the conditions for Mihi to respond, or that I had asked questions in a way that could not be responded to, or that somehow the counselling itself was really off track, or perhaps all of these.

However, I suggest what Mihi may have been experiencing was in part an effect of dominant pakeha practices that work to close down and obscure opportunities to consider that cultural identity could be included in the counselling context. I suggest dominant pakeha values also subject Mihi to thinking about counselling in particular ways: to consider that as counsellor I am interested only in a generalised inquiry; that I am not interested in her Maori identity being made visible in counselling and that I

am not interested in areas of her life where her ethnicity has been abused or marginalised. I suggest also that these dominant pakeha values subject Mihi to expect particular questions and to respond in particular ways. What is particular about these ways is that they close down opportunities for Mihi to speak about the ways she lives her life as a Maori woman and at the same time close down opportunities for me to inquire further. Such ways close down space for counselling conversations to be other than excluding of cultural identity.

I suggest the problem is not with Mihi not knowing how to respond to my inquiry, but with the ‘teaching’ offered her by life experiences, including counselling, that Maori identity was to be obscured, unspoken and unrecognized. The visibility, languaging and recognition in the approach I took to counselling, thus was unfamiliar to her, to the extent that she named this experience “culture shock”, the shock of culture being foregrounded.

### **Implications for counselling**

In terms of the counselling process, Mihi’s experience raises useful questions about consulting clients on how to proceed when the territory for inquiry, and where this may lead, is unknown. “Transparency allows people (clients) to engage with us rather than be passive respondents to our interventions” (Bird, 2000. p. 125). The work I undertake with people who consult me for counselling is informed by a desire to be transparent about my intentions. However, it is clear from Mihi’s comments that my intentions and curiosity required further explanation from me, along with opportunity for discussion. I would hope to make these intentions about inquiry into areas of cultural identity available to Mihi, or others, through this process.

Mihi’s comments also raise questions about the ideas and practices that produce a counselling environment where aspects of cultural identity are not inquired about. Mihi spoke of previous counselling experiences in Aotearoa New Zealand where the difficulties she sought assistance for were not located within the wider context of culture and her cultural identity:



*I've been trained by previous counselling. I've been involved with many counselling situations, so in many ways I've come into your counselling session a product of previous counselling. I could have got away with not attending to that [cultural identity]. If something else comes up and I am somewhere else, then I will be a product of this counselling too ...*

This is a significant point that Mihi makes. For if, as she says, counselling continued to produce her without an ethnic identity then she would continue to be separated from this identity, which would be problematic. At the same time, if as Mihi's counsellor, I were to make assumptions about the meaning of Mihi's cultural identity to her, this would also be problematic. The counselling we have engaged with has investigated, rather than assumed the particular meanings Maori identity has to Mihi's life. It has not assumed there is a universal Maori identity. Instead the counselling has considered the possibility of difference within culture as much as a difference between cultures (Durie, 2001; Phillips, 2007; Sue and Sue 1990). That I did not assume the meaning of Mihi's identity to her, lead Mihi to make the following claim about the counselling discussions we engaged with:

*...[I]t's a shock when people want to [talk about cultural identity], it's quite shocking.*

Mihi spoke further about the effects of the exclusion of her identity as a Maori woman in other spheres of her life, and of how she has become used to conducting her life under the influence of pakeha cultural discourses. While these dominantly constructed discourses do not fit or suit her, she spoke of being bound to live under them. Mihi explained:

*I understand that in other contexts that I am operating in the dominant culture of how people think and how they value things, so I expect **that** (Mihi's emphasis). And that's the expectation I came with and you were wanting to shift that into a place that I wasn't [familiar with]. I've grown up to expect – as I*

*suspect every other Maori has grown up to expect – I expect different values, so we accept it and live with it.*

Clearly, Mihi is saying the effect of pakeha culture to her life and the lives of many Maori is the erasing of her cultural uniqueness, her cultural difference. She says that Maori are used to having their identity overlooked and their knowledge ignored; Maori are trained that pakeha will not be interested in their identity; Maori are trained that the idea of universality will obscure their cultural ethnicity.

### **Caring to ‘regard’ cultural identity**

*I shared with you times when I’ve even had people in my own home who haven’t cared to observe **my** (Mihi’s emphasis) way of living. So for anybody to want to take time out in their context, in their own house – that’s your room, that’s your space, I’ve come into your space, your life, I’ve made that choice – and [you] regard me, that’s shocking, because some people haven’t even regarded me in my own home.*

Mihi’s statement was distressing to witness, as it appeared for her to voice. What would stop me from regarding Mihi in counselling, I asked myself. What had contributed to how Mihi came to understand the space of my counselling office was ‘my’ space and not a space shared by us together? What ideas had I taken for granted about my own approach to counselling, that the practice of regarding Mihi’s identity did not strike me as out of the ordinary?

When Mihi spoke of being “regarded” in a space that (depending on the discursive ideas operating) is not her own, implicit is the matter of whose ways of living are privileged and observed. Mihi may have been suggesting that as she was consulting a pakeha counsellor the counselling space would be organized around pakeha protocols. It is interesting to consider what contributes to the idea of the counselling space being ‘my room’ and ‘my life’ and it invites thought on how western approaches to counselling theory and practice may support this idea. In response to

the suitability of western approaches to counselling Maori, Durie (2001, 2007) offered alternative ideas about the space / room required for greeting and working with Maori families in a counselling context. He suggested the traditional space and interactions of the marae offered a way to understand relationships; how they are best established; and how agreements to commence work are reached with Maori who seek the assistance of counsellors.

Seldom, however is there full appreciation of the potential of marae encounters for shaping thinking and behaviour and providing guidelines for codes of living ... or to appreciate that psychological processes emerging on marae could provide useful models for the wider institutions of society (2001, p. 70.).

Durie thus makes a strong and compelling plea to counsellors to learn from the traditions and knowledge of Maori society.

Returning to the question about the ideas I have taken for granted in my counselling practice and that have supported me in regarding aspects of Maori women's identity, I suggest the following. I have a willingness to hold the ideas of others, including the women who consult me in counselling, and also significant writers - for example, Bird, Durie, Sue and Sue, Smith and White - who stand for justice and who voice the effects of marginalisation on people's lives. I have an interest in keeping alert for alternative voices who speak amidst the dominant pakeha voices. I am committed to exploring the practice of ideas that stand outside dominant cultural discourses. And I do this knowing my practice may have limitations. It is my willingness and sincerity to bring to my counselling practice the ideas of others who stand in support of Mihi and other Maori women that I suggest is what Mihi may have experienced in our counselling relationship. Sue and Sue (1990) say of this attitude of willingness,

Surprisingly, for many culturally different clients, this may be enough to allow rapport building and greater freedom on the part of the counsellor to use techniques different from the client (p. 171).

## Effects of disregard

A further stand to Mihi's speaking was about her experiences of disregard and its effects for her life:

*I can't forever live with that sick feeling in my gut. I accept it [the dominant values]. But I am desensitised in different contexts and counselling is one of those contexts ...I live in this world and I can't be sick all the time... I couldn't even think at times, I would be noticing the disregard.*

It is very concerning and painful for me to hear Mihi speak of being desensitised in the counselling context and I think of the times she has referred to in counselling, of being repeatedly subject to experiences of marginalisation in her life. It is another story of the lack of space to be other than Pakeha, to be different, to be Maori. Mihi's story of the lack of space to be different, of having to give up her own cultural practices and of expecting to live by the dominant pakeha cultural practices of New Zealand society resonates with a story theorist Edward Said (2004) told in writing about the context of Orientalism. He discussed how the West represented the Arab and Eastern world to the rest of the world and "that the interests at work in the representation of the Orient by the West were those of imperial control and were the prerogatives of power" (p.237). Said's commentary, although speaking of a different cultural context, brings into focus how the similar processes of colonisation might have represented Maori society to the West as well as and back to itself. The intention of representation was to separate people from their own histories and identities and to require them to take up the dominant cultural, social and political practices imposed by colonisation. Mihi's experience of giving up Maori cultural practices and of living by the imposed (and now taken for granted) dominant European cultural practices is visible evidence of the intentions for re-presentation. Said offered a possible explanation for the actions of what he named imperialism: "There's a tendency always to homogenize and to turn the other into something monolithic, partly out of not only ignorance but also fear ..." (p. 238). I suggest the counselling Mihi and I engaged with stood apart from those practices that have insisted upon a universal

cultural identity (we are all New Zealanders, all Maori are the same) that have separated Mihi from her history and her identity as a Maori woman, and that have also produced experiences of Otherness. And while standing apart from these practices, I worked to create opportunities for conversations that researched how Mihi saw herself as a Maori woman and privileged her cultural experience, knowledge and practice.

## Unique moments

As we explored Mihi's experience of the practice I describe, the research brought forward moments of unexpected joy and delight as she spoke about some of the differences the conversations about identity had made to her life. Mihi explains:

*Yeah and things have been brought **together, together** rather than separated ... I have expressed in the past that I am too pakeha in a Maori world and too Maori in a Pakeha world. I can exist, not just exist, I can be. It's great, it's so exciting. Fantastic! ... I can just be me.*

Mihi's reflection on the counselling process connects to Durie's (1994) Te Whare Tapa Wha model of health, in which a key feature is integration. The counselling approach Mihi and I engaged with worked to minimise the distinctions made by many Western health settings. For example, in my work as an ACC counsellor, a woman may consult me in overcoming the effects of sexual abuse and at the same time she may consult a Family Court counsellor regarding aspects of her relationship with her partner. Or a woman may consult me as an ACC counsellor regarding trauma and at the same time consult a drug and alcohol counsellor to support in her changing her drug and alcohol use. The counselling approach Mihi and I engaged with supported a relational practice of inquiring about aspects of Mihi's identity within the wider socio-political context. The effect of this for Mihi was one of not having to juggle her identity in different areas of her life. Mihi explains:

*I was comfortable last night [in that social setting] expressing my identity. That's the crux of it. I am Mihi, I am Maori. There are so many dimensions of me. I am enriched by both Maori and Pakeha cultural things and that's it.*

I understood Mihi to be saying she saw her identity as fluid and changing and contributed to by both Maori and Pakeha culture. This understanding suggests Mihi has a preference for living that is inclusive of alternative identities. It is through the telling of this preference in the research that I witness Mihi's intentions for her life. In the process of the telling, these preferences are thickened against the thin descriptions marginalisation would have for her life. White (1997, 2004b, 2007) and Epston and White (1992) wrote of the problem's requirement to have the person see themselves in particular ways. These ways are often negative or 'thin' and lead to totalizing descriptions of a person's identity. Externalising, as I have described in chapter one, is a position in counselling that works to separate the person from the problem. And it is in this process that alternative descriptions of identity of a person's life are brought forth. Narrative practices such as externalising aim to thickly and richly describe and give voice to those identity conclusions that contradict the negative conclusions.

Mihi told me that the identity claims she has made have extended to other areas of her life, for example with whanau and friends when she has "*stood in my own beliefs*". I was curious to learn more about how Mihi had been able to speak about the hopes she held for her life with whanau and friends. She explained:

*Because of all this kind of stuff being about identity ... all this counselling has been about identity... it's celebrating me.*

Clearly Mihi is saying the inclusion in counselling - and in particular counselling in relation to the effects of sexual abuse - of an inquiry into the ways she saw herself as a Maori woman, had effects for other aspects of her life. The inquiry in counselling about cultural identity, supported Mihi in standing strong for other beliefs she held in her life.

## A leap of faith to a space of mutual learning

The research conversation Mihi and I were engaging with began to move into territory that seemed to me full of possibility. At the same time it seemed to move toward the unknown. It was full of the possibility of learning more about my practice as Mihi reflected on the importance of our previous counselling conversations to her life. Mihi said:

*I really think the work you are doing here is important. I went back to Richard [a counsellor Mihi is consulting about another aspect of her life] one time and I said, “I don’t know what she is doing, I just don’t know what is going on. It’s probably part of me that I need to understand”, even to the point of saying “it isn’t working for me”. And when I started to get an understanding, I realise my journey has been enriched...if you give people the opportunity. It was like a rekindling of something...*

I was very interested in the reflections Mihi offered on my counselling practice, especially in relation to the actions and intentions I had for inquiring about aspects of her cultural identity. As we had explored these territories of identity, I had witnessed Mihi taking up a position of authority on her life, as together we created space for her to speak about those areas that had been marginalised. The effect for Mihi, of such a counselling approach where cultural identity has been included, means she is better positioned to speak about what matters in her life. It struck me these conversations in particular, were very significant to Mihi and I was interested to learn more about what might have supported her to continue engaging with these investigations about identity, especially when the intentions of my inquiry, at times seemed unclear to her. Mihi said:

*I have reflected on it, I didn’t know it at the time, okay. I reflected on it. It takes a giant leap of faith on your part to go there [to inquire about cultural identity].*

I was moved by the generosity Mihi's words seem to suggest about my counselling practice. I was also excited for what these reflections might mean to further inquiries I might make with other Maori women who consulted me for counselling. I appreciated the thought and reflection Mihi had given to the effects of the identity inquiries we undertook together and I was also quietly saddened at the way this leap of faith drew attention to experiences in Mihi's life where similar leaps of faith did not happen. In responding to Mihi I wanted to acknowledge the leap of faith she saw me taking in the counselling. At the same time I was interested to offer the possibility that she too, took a giant leap of faith as she replied to my inquiry. I said:

*I am thinking of this research meeting and you saying you thought it was a giant leap of faith for me to ask you about your identity as a Maori woman and as we speak I am thinking, there is also a giant leap of faith for you in responding to my questions. There is some risk in this for us both. Do you have any ideas or thoughts on that?*

Mihi responded to my interest in the following way:

*Well, it's different spaces, there's your space, my space and the space of risk is another space and it's frightening for both of us to go there and try it out. But that's the leap of faith, to go into this mutual space of learning, stripping away momentarily any assumptions we may have and really engage in a process of how best to do that ... how we have worked together has been an interesting and mature relationship ... I asked for books so that I could understand, we have been helping each other create this space.*

This discussion was exciting for me; Mihi was deconstructing the professional discourse of counselling and bringing into focus the nature of our professional relationship with each other. I was interested to learn that Mihi thought of the counselling we undertook as a two way process (White, 1997), as this is the position I



strive to work for in my practice. I have witnessed the effect of expert therapeutic knowledge on the lives of the women who consult me and the very thin descriptions (White, 1997) such knowledge offers their identity. For example, women who have been subject to sexual abuse have described to me the effect of particular therapeutic knowledges, which names her as victim, as unhelpful. Such claims to knowledge position women without agency to act in her life, while at the same time positions the counsellor with authority over a woman's life.

Illustrating the commitment I have shown to creating opportunities for a two way process, Mihi said:

*You can't do it without me and I can't do it without you. You had to do those things for me and I had to do those things for you, so we could be comfortable being here [in the research]. Counselling is usually that unequal balance. ... [W]e have balanced it up ... That's been interesting for me to see and we have both desired that. And that's about you, not about the profession, you, you wanting to go there ...*

Mihi's words shine the light on my preference for a therapeutic practice that emphasises:

the life-shaping nature of this work in respect to the therapist's life. In constructing a two-way account of therapy, the therapist takes responsibility to identify, to acknowledge and to articulate, within the therapeutic context, the real and the potential contribution that this work makes to his/her life (White, 1997, p.130).

I appreciated Mihi's acknowledgment of the contribution I had made to render the relations of power in the counselling relationship more visible and therefore more available for negotiation. I also appreciated the acknowledgment of what Mihi understood as my personal contribution to the counselling. Both acknowledgments offered strength to the ideas of fairness and justice I hold about my practice as a

narrative counsellor. I believe the acknowledgments are an indication that the ethical commitment I bring to counselling to listen to marginalised voices and to appreciate the real effects of this to people's lives, and then to my own life, is valued and is significant to women who consult me. I understand in the professional relationship that Mihi and I have created that if I do not have an ethical commitment to these ways then, "Lost is the opportunity for therapists to take into their own lives the experiences of being so powerfully included in the lives of others" (White, 1997. p. 133).

I would like to offer words from Mihi as a conclusion to this chapter. She offered these thoughts in response to my question, "Do you think it is important that I continue to ask these kinds of questions to women who consult me for counselling?"

*I can't speak for any other individual, but it had been important for me ... I am actually quite gob smacked how much it's benefited me ... What is a human being, it's about identity, how they identify physically, spiritually, emotionally. It's about identity. And some identities go without saying, they are normalized, you don't have to think about it. Nobody has to think about it. But for identities that are marginalised, for people to choose to have that identity, then it's a useful place to explore.*

Again, Mihi alerts me to the importance to her, of her unique identity, one that has been supported by counselling conversations that have included exploration of aspects of her cultural identity.

## **Chapter six: Nikki**

### ***Introduction***

The story Nikki tells of the relationship between counselling and aspects of her identity as a Maori woman, is one which acknowledges her history, her ancestors and her whanau.

In November 2007, Nikki and I met to begin co-researching the effects of the counselling conversations which had included speaking about aspects of how Nikki saw herself as a Maori woman. As in my counselling practice when meeting people for the first time, I explained the way I hoped to work in the research project. I talked about the intentions I had for the project and gave examples of times in counselling when I understood us to be engaging in conversations about this identity. I asked Nikki if she had questions about the ways we would work together; if there were aspects of the research she would like clarified or if there was anything else she was uncertain about.

### ***An initial reflection***

As I typed the transcript I noticed how much of the talking I did in the initial phase of the meeting with Nikki. This would not be usual in my counselling practice. There are a number of reasons for more-than-usual talking. Firstly, it connects to my intention to offer as full an explanation as possible about the research. This included the understandings gained from the two completed research meetings, with Mihi and Huia, about what information women found to be useful in getting started with the research. Secondly, I was also keen to demonstrate accountability to Nikki. The accountability I am interested in, is of the kind referred to by Denzin and Lincoln (2003) when they wrote of qualitative research: “Qualitative inquiry is properly conceptualised as a civic, participatory, collaborative project. This joins the researcher and the researched in an ongoing moral dialogue” (p. 615). And thirdly, my talking was recognition of Nikki’s willingness to participate and engage in a

conversation that was outside the realm of the counselling and an acknowledgment of the collaborative efforts that the conversation would engage us in. I hoped too, it was a demonstration of the ethic of transparency that was important to me in the project and in my work as a counsellor.

### ***An understanding of cultural identity***

Nikki asked a question when we first started the meeting. This question was in response to my comment, I've been brought up as a pakeha and I haven't had to step into the Maori world to live my life. Nikki replied:

*Until you see Maori people?*

The question captured my attention, for while Mihi had been subject to the idea that her cultural identity was to be separated from the counselling, Nikki's question invited me to consider that when meeting Maori people in counselling, I would have to step into a Maori world. Included in this stepping into a Maori world, would be an inquiry of the person about aspects of their cultural identity. Te Wiata (2006) might view such 'stepping' in a counselling context as a step toward an "in-between territory" where "alternative articulations of identity are possible" (p.7) and where "mutual contribution to identity for both Maori and Pakeha can be acknowledged..." (p.v). As a practitioner, Te Wiata's idea offered me an appreciation of the nature of the space created between Nikki and me as we engaged with cultural identity conversations in counselling. The idea of this in-between territory suggested that further conversations about identity might yet be generated in this research with Nikki. These ideas also offered me hope that the counselling conversations had contributed in some way to aspects of Nikki's identity as a Maori woman and my identity as a Pakeha counsellor and that these contributions would be illuminated by the research we were about to undertake.

To return to Nikki's question, "Until you see Maori people?" and its significance to me and the counselling I undertake. Nikki's comment directed my attention to the

responsibility I have, as a counsellor, to investigate aspects of cultural identity with the Maori women who consult me. Indeed, I take Nikki's comment to emphasise the importance of such an inquiry to any counselling.

### ***The tangi – a sense of timing***

The research offered Nikki and me the opportunity to revisit some of the conversations we had engaged with during counselling. In particular, I was curious to revisit a conversation we had had about the tangi for Te Arikinui Dame Te Atairangikaahu. I hoped to learn something of the meanings this conversation may have held for Nikki. I was also interested to learn more about the times when we had talked about Nikki's whakapapa and especially what had supported Nikki to talk with me about aspects of her history.

I began an exploration of these areas by inviting Nikki to think about the counselling discussion we had engaged in following the tangi for the Maori Queen. After Nikki suggested it would be helpful, I offered my recollection of the contents of the meeting and also spoke about the tentativeness with which I decided to inquire about the tangi. I explained to her, the tentativeness was in relation to the possibility that she (Nikki) might have taken the change I had initiated in the direction of counselling – that is to introduce the tangi that had just taken place - to mean I had no interest in appreciating the severity of the difficulties she was experiencing, when this was not the case. I had initiated this change in conversational direction, for what I saw as a therapeutic purpose. As a counsellor I had the hope (and a hunch) that an inquiry about the tangi might open possibilities other than those already available to us. Possibly it might bring forward alternative accounts of Nikki's identity; accounts that stepped away from the problem saturated stories of which she currently spoke and which were hugely burdening to her.

The tangi for Dame Te Atairangikaahu had taken place some days prior to this particular counselling meeting with Nikki. It had received significant coverage by media, illustrating the significance of the event and the importance of the life of the

Maori Queen to Maoridom and to all of Aotearoa New Zealand. As I sat with Nikki, the effects of witnessing the events of the week of the tangi on TV, listening to the radio and reading print media were still with me. It seemed that to ignore offering the tangi as an opportunity for conversations in counselling would be disrespectful at the minimum and more seriously, an act of marginalising Nikki's cultural history. It was important to me as a professional counsellor to acknowledge a part of Nikki's cultural history and to do so, whether or not it was something we would take further in the counselling conversations together. I did not know what was about to unfold as I tentatively asked Nikki if she had watched the tangi for the Maori Queen. But I hoped there might be glimmers of an alternative thread to Nikki's life to which counselling might pay attention.

Nikki's initial response to the inquiry, of smiling and sitting upright in her chair, indicated my speaking might be experienced by her as an important act of respect and recognition. At the same time the means to offer a different account of aspects of Nikki's life was being made available. Nikki spoke of the many ways the tangi had been important to her; of the very significant and proud connections it had brought forth with her ancestry; of having a place to stand within that history and of the significance of this knowledge to her life and that of her tamariki. As a counsellor, this conversation seemed to me to be particularly meaningful to Nikki, and thus to have therapeutic benefit. My reflections on it helped to produce this research project. Now in my research inquiry, I began to inquire of Nikki what significance this conversation had had for her. Nikki offered the following:

*I wasn't really raised Maori. My mother passed away when I was young, but my mother was the one who was into Maoritanga. When she died everything changed. My father was from the European world. When the Queen passed away ... I [previously] knew nothing about her, all I knew was she was the Maori Queen. It was very touching even though I was amongst the violence and stuff at home, I had that moment to sit back and watch it on TV. It was very peaceful just to watch. And learning from my family, there was photo of my*

*tipuna. I didn't know he was my tipuna until my sister told me when I was doing that programme recently. And fortunately the kaumatua [who were there] knew all about it.*

I was very moved to witness Nikki speak of how watching the tangi was an oasis of peace amidst the violence to which she was subject. I was moved to hear how in that moment of watching the tangi the effects of the violence eased. This was a therapeutic moment of significance to Nikki and to me. It made alternative threads of Nikki's life available for exploration. The thread that captured our interest was Nikki's ancestry. As the discussion unfolded, Nikki's enthusiasm to tell this aspect of her history was an indication that the conversation had the potential to position Nikki differently in relation to how she lives her life. Nikki continued the telling; speaking of a programme she had attended:

*We women had to stand up and give our whakapapa, our river, our mountain. They [kaumatua] were very surprised to hear my whaikorero. They came up to me at morning tea and said they were surprised I was from that line ... It was more surprising to me. They were surprised when I was rolling off all the Maori names and brought them a photo of my great grandfather ... I think if I didn't do the programme I wouldn't know my whakapapa ...*

As Nikki told the story of how she learned about her whakapapa and of how she stood and gave a whaikorero at the programme, I was aware that I was witnessing a re-telling (White, 2004b, 2007) of this experience. It is through the re-telling of such experiences that these experiences became more available as preferred stories into which people may step. I was privileged to be an audience to Nikki's re-telling and understood this as a moment to treat with care. It held the potential for Nikki and me to explore further identity claims.

### ***To the reader – a careful practice***

At this point, I wish to draw the reader's attention to the way my inquiry with Nikki was carefully considered. I wish the reader to appreciate the matters I took into account before and during both the research and the counselling with the hope the reader will be able to locate my intentions for the inquiry about the tangi within this account.

Nikki referred to the ways the programme assisted her to have an appreciation of her ancestry. She spoke of how it supported her to speak about her ancestry with others. I have previously discussed the tentativeness with which I approached my initial enquiry about the tangi. However, Nikki's reference to the programme drew to my attention to yet another dimension of this process, the care with which I undertook the inquiry. The sort of care I refer to ensured that Nikki was well positioned to respond with the certainty of her own knowledge about her ancestry. I did not want to position her to respond with whakama (embarrassment). As a pakeha inquiring about the importance of the tangi to Nikki, I understood there was a risk of producing an experience of whakama or embarrassment about her connection to Te Ao Maori, to things Maori. It was possible that Nikki might have little or no knowledge of her ancestry or of the Maori world.

To reduce the possibility of whakama, I was guided by a previous reference made by Nikki, in counselling, to her ethnic identity as 'Maori'. Some might view this as a rather slim point by which to be guided in counselling practice. However I preferred to understand Nikki's naming of her identity as an indication to me of its importance to her. In naming her identity Nikki made it possible to inquire further about its meaning to her. Such an inquiry would be located in the wider context within which her identity was constructed.

I suggest those who argue for not proceeding with an inquiry about the tangi, would claim a pakeha could not be alert to the power positioning within dominant cultural discourses that would inform such an inquiry. However I suggest if I do not take



these tentative steps, drawing on as much knowledge I can, then the counselling practice I engage with is likely to remain within the realms of those described by Durie (1989, 2001) and Durie and Hermansson (1990) as unhelpful and inappropriate. The effects of such practice will be, at the least, unhelpful to Maori women who consult me for counselling. If at any point, I noticed the effects of my inquiry hinted at positioning Nikki adversely, I would have not pressed on. Instead I would have acknowledged the effects of my enquiry to her and shifted the direction of the meeting as I do in my counselling practice. If Nikki thought it possible, I would have investigated the experience of being adversely positioned with her. I would also seek both clinical and cultural consultation on this aspect of my work.

### ***Witnessing the effects of racism***

The tangi and its importance to Nikki's life was a conversation Nikki and I kept returning to in the research conversation. As we ventured into areas that were painful for Nikki to speak, a thread leading us back to the tangi was readily available. In reflection I wondered if the experience of peace Nikki first described while watching the tangi in August 2006, was available to her to return to during the research in 2007. I wondered if returning to this experience of peace supported Nikki to speak further to the painful effects of racism in her life, as our research conversation continued.

An inquiry into aspects of cultural identity brings the possibility of witnessing pain and hurt as the women speak of experiences of marginalisation. As I sat and witnessed the painful effects of racism on Huia and Mihi's life, so too, did I sit witness the effects of racism on Nikki's life:

*I try not to be open about it with my friend ... He's European and I've realised now and before not to talk about it. Even if I was in conversation with an aunty in front of him and we'd be talking about whanau or the past. It was really difficult talking about Maori protocol in front of my friend. He didn't like it, he'd abuse it, so now, it's not that I'm discreet about it around him. He's got a*

*choice, I come as a package. He's got all this racialism. I said to him "When my whanau are around, aunties, who are old, my family," I said, "You just don't get up, slam cups around and stomp your feet because they are speaking Maori. It's because they can't speak English". I find it difficult. If he was visiting us, I couldn't go and put on the DVD of the Maori Queen. That's why I said to him, "You are going to have to meet me half way with your western ways of living".*

This work presents me, as counsellor, with moments of witnessing great pain in the life of another person. Within these moments of pain are moments of hope, a hope that is "specific to people and place, the past, present and future" (Weingarten, 2003. p. 227). Compassionately witnessing Nikki's experiences of being subject to racism was painful for me.

But the pain of deeply registering what we hear co-exists with our perception that the speaker is benefiting from being heard, even though the act of telling the story may be difficult. (Weingarten, 2003. p. 231)

As I listened intently to Nikki's story, moments of hope emerged. These moments of hope connected to the courage Nikki held in standing up to the racist words and to her care for protecting the cultural identity of the people within her whanau. I understood this to be a moment when Nikki appreciated my interest in the particularities of her life. This interest offered Nikki the position of witnessing aspects of her cultural identity as something that was included in discussion, rather than marginalised and silenced. It offered Nikki an appreciative witnessing of her speaking about the injustices, rather than one that was scorned and abused. In witnessing Nikki's steps to protect her identity and stand against the racism, she was offered a position of agency in her life. In speaking of agency, I am referring to the narrative idea that people have more or less power to act in their lives depending on how they are positioned within a certain discourse. White (2007) wrote:

[M]any people find that avenues for expression of personal agency and responsible action are very limited because they are subject to "traditional power relations" that are institutionalised in local culture. These include the

power relations of disadvantage, of race, of gender, of heterosexism, of culture, of ethnicity, and more. (p. 267)

Nikki described to me how racist discourse operated to marginalise her and thereby reduced the power she had to act in her life. My witnessing of the effects of this racism and Nikki's stand against it, offered Nikki a position where she might act with some authority and power in her life.

In listening closely to Nikki's story, I indicated my commitment to continue to create space in our counselling conversations for further stories of marginalisation to be told. I indicated my commitment to the belief I held, that as a pakeha counsellor, I have a responsibility to investigate with the people who consult me, aspects of their cultural identity. I thus indicated my commitment to the belief I hold for a fair and just society.

### ***Further effects of witnessing racism***

As I sat and listened with care to Nikki's experiences of being subject to racism, I noticed Nikki was also witnessing me. Nikki was interested in my interest in her stories. "The person who tells the story to a compassionate witness is inhabiting the role of witness in the very act of telling the story, even if for just a few moments" (Weingarten, 2003, p. 232). I understood the effect of Nikki witnessing my interest in her life invited her to speak further to the experiences of racism. Speaking about another person in her life she said:

*I try not to have too much to do with her, because she's really racist. And that's sad because her grandson is Maori. She calls us black...*

As I listened to Nikki speak of another person's racism toward her and her son, I noticed tentativeness in her speaking. The tentativeness led me to wonder if she had not experienced compassionate witnessing by me, of her experiences of racism by a friend, whether she would have proceeded to speak of the experiences to which her son was subject.

## **A witnessing response**

I was moved by Nikki's story of marginalisation and of resistance, and after our research meeting wrote a letter to Nikki. The following is an extract that witnesses both the sadness and the resistance of Nikki's experiences of marginalisation using the outsider witness format described by White (2004b, 2007), described in chapter three:

*I was saddened to hear you speak of the ways racism had affected the relationship between you and your friend, pushing you apart, and how it has meant Aunties and members of your whanau have been disrespected when they speak Te Reo. And I was saddened, too, in hearing how your son also has been subject to racism in his young life and how this has deeply hurt you as a parent. And at the same time, Nikki, I was struck by the way you spoke out against the racist words and abusive behaviour and made a stand for your whanau, your Aunties and yourself as Maori women. As I transcribed the words of our meeting, I had a picture of you standing strong together with your Aunties and whanau and standing against the disrespect and the abuse, all the while protecting something very important to you. Your stand is an inspiration to me. And as I think about standing strong in my own life, I will hold your story close to me.*

Nikki's account of her life was both inspiring and painful for me to witness. I hoped the letter might acknowledge to Nikki the ways her story had been contributing to the

understandings in my own life of the effects of racism. I hoped my letter would acknowledge the contribution her words had made to my understanding of how people hold onto hope in the face of abuse and disrespect. I wanted Nikki to know that her account had offered me hope and inspiration for the lives of the women who I continued to meet with in my work and who had also been subject to violence.

### ***An invitation to act***

And as I reflected further on how Nikki spoke about the experiences of racism she was subjected to in her life, I wondered whether there was perhaps something that she thought or hoped I might do. Did Nikki hope that in my witnessing her speaking about the pain and hurt of racism that I might go about aspects of the counselling differently? Did she hope I might take action in my own life against racist practices I witnessed day to day? Did she perhaps hope I might take action with the professional association to which I belonged and call attention to the experiences of Maori women? Or perhaps it was something else Nikki hoped for, in speaking about the effects of marginalisation on her life. And maybe it was all of these. I appreciated I might not fully understand the extent of Nikki's intentions for speaking about the injustices. However what I clearly understood was the responsibility I held as a pakeha counsellor to explore the effects of racism on the life of her as a person. And I understood that I should take action in ways that stood against these racist practices whether it was in the smallest details of a counselling conversation or in the more visible areas of my life.

### ***The reciprocity of the meeting***

Throughout the meeting Nikki contributed to facilitating our conversation by asking questions for clarification and by also suggesting questions I might wish to ask of her. For example, after explaining my intentions as pakeha counsellor / researcher for the project, Nikki asked:

*What did you mean by that?*

When I spoke about the possible effects of my ethnicity to the counselling and checked with Nikki if this made sense to her, she suggested:

*I think if you ask me questions, [this would clarify your purpose, your meaning].*

And again when I asked about her experiences of how the programme assisted her in naming her tipuna, Nikki replied:

*When you say, “how do I feel talking about it”, I don’t quite understand. Do you mean, what do I think talking to you about my ancestors?*

In these different ways Nikki guided the discussion, offering alternative direction and further areas for exploration in the meeting. I appreciated Nikki’s willingness to lead the conversation at different moments within the research process; it suggested to me reciprocity of interest in the discussion and the ideas. Importantly I understood the reciprocity to say something about the relationship Nikki and I had developed throughout the counselling and which continued to support the research project.

The relationship Nikki and I have created has been shaped by my belief in the practice of inclusion; my ongoing attention to power relations within the counselling and research relationship; the speaking positions offered to Nikki, and the decentred and influential position I take to my work as counsellor. These qualities have supported the speaking of injustices and at the same time worked toward questioning the taken for granted. To illustrate the operation of these qualities, I offer an example from our research conversation. Nikki and I were talking about the effects of racism on her life and her son’s life. I responded with regret at hearing of Nikki being spoken about in disrespectful ways. At the same time I witnessed my own thinking to Nikki. I said rather clumsily how the pain of her story was a reminder of how I did not wish to act in people’s lives. Nikki replied:

*Be racist? ... And do you think you are?*

Nikki's question to me was wonderfully refreshing and unexpected, although it should not have been because reciprocity of this kind had occurred with another of the women during the project. The effect of Nikki's question had me appreciating how carefully we had negotiated the counselling relationship. I had inquired about the ways oppressive practices operated in Nikki's life and at the same time worked to avoid their replication in the counselling. In reflection, the negotiation of the relationship during counselling, in the ways described was barely visible and perhaps this may have contributed to the surprise I experienced when Nikki asked the question, "And do you think you are?"

I responded to Nikki's question, again rather clumsily. As part of my response, I asked Nikki if she thought there had been times when I had said things she would consider racist. Nikki said no. When inquiring about the effects of marginalisation on people's lives I attempt to create the spaces for these kinds of conversations in different ways. I do this to ensure as many opportunities as possible are available for people to speak about the effects of marginalisation on their lives. I invited Nikki to consider another question about how I might have inadvertently contributed to reproducing experiences of marginalisation during the counselling:

*Maybe comments I have said that have put you in a position where you have felt uncomfortable about aspects of your culture?*

Again Nikki replied, no.

Returning to Nikki's question, "And do you think you are [racist]?" begged more thought and attention than I offered at the research meeting. It invited an acknowledgment of the challenge it presented to my counselling life, my day to day life and to the ways I think and act in the world. In the follow up letter I hoped to acknowledge the contribution Nikki's question made to my thinking:

*You asked me the question, when we were speaking about racism, “and do you think you are?” Thank you for asking this question, Nikki. It is an important question to me in my work as a counsellor. To answer you I would say that this research project is helping me to learn more about myself as a Pakeha woman and about how the culture in which I live contributes to my life while at the same time marginalising the lives of many Maori women. The contribution of your stories to the project also helps me appreciate the ways racism affects your day to day life and also affects the lives of other Maori women who consult me. I very much appreciated your question to me Nikki, it has got me thinking more about how I wish to act in my life with the people I meet in counselling, my family and my friends.*

### ***Nikki's response to an inquiry of cultural identity***

I was interested to learn more from Nikki about the times, during counselling, when we talked about her ancestry and whakapapa. I was curious to know whether these conversations had been useful to her and in what ways. My intention for this inquiry was to appreciate the importance and meaning Nikki gave to these cultural identity conversations. I also wished to gain a sense of the possibilities for future discussion with Nikki and with other Maori women who consulted me for counselling. Nikki offered this response:

*Yeah it does help me, even though I don't know a lot about it (whakapapa). But*



*what I have learnt when we talk about it, refreshes my memory ... We are all different. For me it's fine, but you might strike someone who knows nothing and you might end up inspiring the woman to go out with: "the counsellor asked me about" ... For me it was inspiring to know more, ... It depends, because we are all different.*

Nikki's reply, "*it refreshes my memory*", called my attention to the benefit of retelling. For Nikki, I understood her re-telling was a reminder of knowledges she held and that were very important to her and her whanau. Nikki's reply was also a reminder to me to tread quietly and carefully with ideas and questions about ancestry, to not assume all Maori women will be interested in talking about whakapapa.

I was struck by Nikki's claim that an enquiry about ancestry might be "*inspiring*". Inspiration was an alternative construction for me to consider in situations where there was uncertainty of knowledge. Inspiration offered an alternative response to one of producing embarrassment or whakama. Again, Nikki's response called my attention to the ways discourses of ethnicity, marginalisation and pakeha privilege can easily produce binary thinking. This kind of thinking could limit the possibility of venturing into territory that is yet unknown. That Nikki could be inspired by an inquiry into her ancestry rather than embarrassed, was significant to me. It revealed as much about the ideas and assumptions I held about knowledge and learning as it did about the areas for further inquiry Nikki and I might make together. With the benefit of Nikki's experience I am interested to explore what kind of conditions support Maori women in talking about their ethno-cultural identity in ways that are inspiring of those identities. I am interested to learn more about what kinds of engagement in counselling produce inspiration about identity rather than whakama.

### ***What made the conversation possible***

Of particular interest to me in the research was the way Nikki took up the conversation about the tangi and of her ancestors. I wondered what might have made such a conversation possible.

*I think I could talk about it to anyone, any race, as long as they understood what I was saying, which I knew you did, I think you did. It's how they would take it. I could explain it to any person. Like with you I didn't mind at all talking about what I knew about my ancestry ...I probably wouldn't have been able to tell you anything if it wasn't for the programme ... as long as they [the person listening] understand, as long as I was making myself clear.*

I understood Nikki's comment "*It's how they would take it*" and "*as long as they **understand** what I was saying*" as an invitation. It was an invitation for me to understand and therefore for her to be understood as a woman with a history informed by her cultural identity which included an account of her whakapapa. As a counsellor and a pakeha counsellor, I believe such invitations are important to take up. They offer the possibility of further meaning making about aspects of cultural identity. Nikki supports my position:

*Probably knowing the fact that you had an interest in it for yourself ... I think I felt you had an interest in it.*

To conclude this chapter I wish to end with a comment by Nikki. While it would be possible to interpret these words in a number of ways, including by suggesting Nikki was experiencing obligation to me as researcher and counsellor, I suggest these words represents the generosity of Nikki's participation in this research and demonstrates the spirit of reciprocity I have mentioned earlier. In addition I suggest it speaks of the hopes Nikki holds for this research to touch the lives of other Maori women who seek my assistance in counselling:

*I just hope it has been helpful to you.*

## **Chapter seven: A discussion**

### ***How my practice has been shaped by this research***

My wish for all the women involved in this project is "...to have a voice, and not just any voice but one that could be identified as belonging to [them]" (hooks, 2000, p.5).

### ***Introduction***

The conversations offered in the three previous chapters are conversations that continue to touch the life of the counselling relationships between Huia, Mihi and Nikki and me. In this respect they are conversations that have not stopped. I have witnessed moments of the research conversations being woven back into counselling conversations, as together, Huia, Mihi, Nikki and I have further investigated ideas of identity. Such weaving has encouraged us in our exploration of aspects of cultural identity, and in particular the meaning these kinds of conversations have in a counselling context. The research conversations are also ones that I take with me when I meet with other Maori women for counselling. They have contributed to my understandings of experiences of marginalisation and sexual abuse. I am privileged to have worked with Huia, Mihi and Nikki on this project and to have experienced the generosity and willingness of their contributions to my professional and personal life. In this way too, Huia, Mihi and Nikki stand alongside me as I endeavor to work to create space for new kinds of conversations (Te Wiata, 2006) with Maori women who seek my assistance.

### ***The conclusion of the research***

Any research has its boundaries and limits and I have reached the point in this study where I do not have ethical approval to offer a record of the ongoing development in terms of the counselling or in terms of the lives of the women. What I can offer is the ongoing story of my practice, of how this research has influenced the ways I understand myself to be practising and of the ways it contributes to my work with the Maori women who consult me.

I now consider the effects of re-presenting the conversations of this research on my practice as counsellor. I offer some understandings that have been made possible by the particular process of this research. I discuss the understandings generated by the project in relation to the research questions.

### ***Echoes between the women's stories***

As I wrote the chapters on the women, I noticed reverberations between the stories Huia, Mihi and Nikki told. These threads of experience became visible as together we researched the effect of the counselling conversations that included how they saw themselves as Maori women. That there are aspects of the women's stories in common suggests to me the importance of including ethno-cultural identity inquiries within the counselling process, including sexual abuse counselling. These threads also offer possible areas of inquiry for future counselling conversations.

In this research project, I had not anticipated how the collective effect the three women's experiences would contribute to my professional and personal life. In the following sections, I present my understanding and the effects on my work, of the shared aspects of the women's stories. These echoes include: the significance of whakapapa; the social and political context; the effects of racism; the experience of universality, and a particular kind of listening. I then present how listening to the collective stories has taken me further in my counselling practice.

### **The significance of whakapapa**

As Huia, Mihi and Nikki spoke, they each carefully located themselves by whakapapa. They did this through the stories they told about their lives and through the stories they told about their counselling experiences. In these stories the women acknowledged their ancestors; they acknowledged the contribution of previous generations to their lives and the influence of this whakapapa to their identity as Maori women today. This acknowledgment and speaking was at times direct, but it was not always. Rather, at other times it was suggested, inferred or was implicit in their comments. For example:

*The chiefs were gone; one chief was arrested and taken away and hanged...it must have been very difficult to be a chief...*

*We had to stand up and give our whakapapa, our river, our mountain...*

As Huia, Mihi and Nikki shared some of the stories of their ancestors with me, I felt very humbled and privileged. I had not imagined at the beginning of the research, how talking about whakapapa would shape this project or would shape future counselling conversations. I was struck by the women's collective voice about the significance to them, of including whakapapa in counselling conversations and in the sexual abuse counselling. I will carry their voices and the invitation I understand they have extended to me, to continue to inquire about whakapapa and ancestry as I meet with other women for counselling.

### **The social and political context**

As we engaged in the research conversations, further aspects to the stories of marginalised identities were brought forth. Each woman spoke of the importance to them, of these stories being located within the social and political context within which they were produced, that is a dominant pakeha culture with a history of colonising practices. The women spoke of how aspects of their lives and their identities had been shaped and were continuing to be shaped by the history of Aotearoa New Zealand. These ways of speaking actively engaged the women in a political analysis of their lives, an analysis that has also included the ongoing historical effects of colonization. For example:

*There were young girls who were selling themselves for food to the soldiers that had killed the people that had brought them up.*

*I have expressed in the past that I am too Pakeha in a Maori world and too Maori in a Pakeha world.*

I was struck by the powerful effect colonisation has had on the day to day life of Huia, Mihi, Nikki and their whanau. I had not understood the extent to which the women made connections between their experiences of abuse and marginalisation, back to the experiences of their ancestors. In this respect, I am grateful. I now appreciate more fully how the counselling I engage with, must reach back to the past to include in the present, these historical and political contexts.

### **The effects of racism - the operation of privilege**

Nikki, Mihi and Huia each spoke of how racism was a continuing experience in their lives and the lives of their whanau. Again these conversations turned towards the colonising practices of early New Zealand history and the legacy these practices have left for many Maori. More immediately, the research conversations which spoke about the effects of racism also drew the women's attention to the ways they saw this practice operating in their lives and in the communities in which they lived. They spoke of how they witnessed the practices of racism and privilege at work and how experiences in their lives were not represented in society. For example:

*I try not to be open about it [being Maori] with my friend ...I've realised now and before not to talk about it.*

*I understand that in other contexts that I am operating in the dominant culture of how people think and how they value things, so I expect that.*

*My daughter missed out on being in the front row of the kapa haka group because there was a boy whose aunty made cakes and the principal liked cakes and you could see it [the injustice, the privilege] working.*

Witnessing the women speak about the effects of racism in their lives was painful. I was taken to those aspects of my life when I have enacted and been in receipt of privilege that I have not worked for, and I am reminded of the privilege I inherit as a member of the dominant culture in Aotearoa New Zealand. I am also taken to

moments when I have resisted pakeha privilege, when I have inquired and made a stand about unfair practices and when I have sought out alternative accounts of events. The ways Huia, Mihi and Nikki live with and seek to make sense of the pain in their lives is an inspiration to me. Their words support me to continue to work towards making visible the relations of power that operate in the counselling room, and also in the lives of the people who consult me for counselling.

### **The experience of universality**

A common thread in the conversations of this project was the way in which the women's ethno-cultural identity was obscured largely by dominant pakeha practices. In their own words, the women spoke of the experience of being invisible, of not counting in the society in which they lived. This was especially reflected in their experiences of education and schooling, and in counselling. The effect of invisibility for the woman, while different, had similarities. They described setting aside their ethno-cultural identities in many situations of their lives; of being trained by dominant discursive practices that their identity as Maori did not matter; and of being trained to live with the invisibility in spite of this producing sickness. For example:

*I would never care to share anything about my identity, always viewing it as irrelevant, particularly to a pakeha counsellor...*

*I've grown up to expect – as I suspect every other Maori has grown up to expect – I expect different values, so we accept it and live with it.*

*Learning lullabies that made no sense, English lullabies...Think of the things I could have remembered instead of what I have stored in my mind...*

I was saddened to witness the women speak of the ways pakeha culture had operated so that they experienced themselves as invisible. Witnessing their words I became more aware of my own visibility and the responsibility I had for how I might act in my professional and personal life. At the same time my hope is that in holding the

words of the women close to me, I will be prompted to inquire about the effects of invisibility in the lives of others.

### **A particular kind of listening – compassionate witnessing**

Huia, Nikki and Mihi each spoke of the experience of being listened to as they told of their experiences of marginalisation. In this listening alternative territories for investigation became available, and therefore a deconstruction of the effects of marginalisation was possible. The significance of a different kind of listening to how the women told their stories was evident to me by the extent to which they spoke of these experiences. Manthei (2006) in reviewing the literature regarding people's experiences of counselling wrote about how clients do not necessarily speak with their counsellors about "particular topics" (p. 68). While this literature review did not highlight marginalisation as a "particular topic", it did state a "reason clients give for withholding some information include, ... simply not thinking the matter is important enough to raise" (p.68). Given that Mihi, in particular, spoke about the discursive influence of pakeha culture to her identity as a Maori woman, it is likely that Maori women consulting me for counselling might think "the matter is not important enough to raise". Therefore, I suggest that for the women to speak about the effects of racism in the counselling and in the research is a significant step. It suggests that I attended to the conditions that supported the women to tell their stories and at the same time created the conditions that supported me to listen. The following examples illustrate this point:

*Because of all this stuff being about identity ... all this counselling has been about identity ...it's celebrating me.*

*It's been healing for me. It's important for me to carry on with trying to talk.*

*I think I could talk about it to anyone, any race as long as they understood what I was saying, which I knew you did, I think you did. It's how they would take it.*



When I hear Huia, Mihi and Nikki speak about the difference compassionate witnessing has made to their lives I am at once humbled and full of joy. I am eager to learn more. I imagine the many possible effects compassionate witnessing can have in the lives of people who consult me and in my own life. In this way hearing the women's words is very sustaining of me.

### ***The understandings I have gained in light of the research questions***

In the following sections I describe how the process of witnessing the stories told by the women, within the context of the research, has invited me to think beyond my current ways of practising. I offer some of the understandings I have reached and the hopes I hold for future counselling relationships. I discuss the connection between the women's experiences of marginalisation and the effects of colonisation; other connections that have been made available by the research; the effect of listening in particular ways, and reciprocity and taking it back practices.

### **Appreciating the connection between local experience and the effects of colonisation**

As a result of the research meetings with Mihi, Huia and Nikki, I appreciate more fully the extent to which many of their experiences of everyday living are local expressions of the effect of colonization. The personal stories of marginalization the women have shared with me, I understand also reflect in part the history of the struggles between Maori and Pakeha. These struggles have touched me deeply and are ones that I cannot ignore, in either my professional or personal life. As I consider the kind of action I might take in my life regarding these struggles, I find useful the perspective hooks (2000) offered when she wrote about the feminist movement in the USA in the 1970s. She described how this movement was shaped by racist biases and also the subsequent investigation of these biases:

the will to change, the will to create the context for struggle and liberation, remains stronger than the need to hold onto wrong beliefs and assumptions.

(p. 58)

I join with hooks when thinking about the ways I wish to practice as a counsellor. The position I prefer to take, is that despite the complexity of marginalisation and racism as an area for me to address as a counsellor and regardless of how complex it is to address my own whiteness and privilege in my professional and personal life, I have an interest and willingness to work towards more equitable and fair relationships. In order for me to be practicing in a fair and equitable way, the counselling, I suggest, needs to deconstruct those areas that as a pakeha, I can easily take for granted; for example privilege. Therefore this study, which also sits among other projects in my life, is a step toward investigating how the counselling relationships I engage with in my work, and in particular relationships with Maori women, can work towards such fairness. I suggest this can be done in part, by inquiring about the experiences of marginalisation that Maori women are likely to have been subject to in their lives and that they bring quietly to the counselling room.

### **Making connections**

This project, through the words of Mihi, Nikki and Huia, has also assisted me to appreciate more keenly how, had the counselling not provided the opportunity to investigate experiences of racism, and had it not located these experiences in the wider context of a society whose history has been shaped by colonisation, I would have been in danger of reproducing a colonising counselling practice and thus a colonising research project (Smith, 1999). I did not wish “to silence or suppress ways of knowing, [or suppress] the languages for knowing...” (Smith, 1999, p.69) or close down alternative possibilities for action in the women’s lives, by not inquiring about the effects of racism.

Implicit in the women speaking about their experiences of racism, is the invitation to me to take up and offer conversations about such effects in the lives of other women I meet for counselling. My understanding of this invitation was supported by the women restating and checking with me the purpose of this research: that it would be helpful to my work with other Maori women. In checking the purpose, I suggest the women were indicating the hopes they held for their voices to reach beyond our

counselling relationship. I also understand that when the women spoke of these hopes, that they were also hopeful their stories might assist women who consulted other counsellors.

### **Attunement to listening in particular ways**

An effect I have noticed, of the women speaking with me about their experiences of marginalisation, is that I am more alert to the everyday practices that silence Maori women and that marginalise their experiences of abuse. I am alert to the ways Maori women, men and children can be objectified, disrespected and frequently subject to generalised comments by the media. At the same time, however, many of these same media comments have been a great source of inspiration in my work. They have become so, as I have developed an attunement to listening in particular ways that support the counselling work with Maori women. Such attunement is not new to my work. However, since undertaking the research meetings I have appreciated the significant contribution such listening has made to the counselling meetings and the potential contribution it has for future counselling. It has been by adjusting my ear to the moments provided by newspapers, television, the internet and radio that I have attempted to position myself to offer a counselling practice that, in part subverts such generalized ways of speaking. For example, I have been interested to listen to the ideas expressed in radio discussions regarding the concepts of youth justice in New Zealand. I have been interested to listen at times, to the views expressed on the radio programme, “Concepts of nationhood: The significance of the declaration of Dominion status for New Zealand in 1907”

([http://www.radionz.co.nz/nr/programmes/concepts\\_of\\_nationhood](http://www.radionz.co.nz/nr/programmes/concepts_of_nationhood) retrieved 1 April, 2008). I have been interested to read in the local newspaper about the effects of changing healthcare services for Maori families. These moments of interest that I gather for future counselling conversations may appear as random occurrences.

At times, I have intentionally sought out such interests with a person or persons from my counselling practice in mind, and who I think might appreciate the opportunity to engage in conversation around such a matter. For example, the tangi for Te Arikiniui

Dame Te Atairangikaahu and the newspaper reporting on Professor Russell Bishop's research into Maori children's experiences of schooling, were both times I actively sought the information offered by the different media. My hope in doing so was that the counselling could acknowledge aspects of life that might be significant to the Maori women who consulted me and thereby contribute to the possibility of an alternative territory in which to explore the construction of identity.

A responsibility of this kind 'listening for' is my interest to offer the understandings from the conversations with this small community of Maori women to other counsellors and colleagues. In doing so I appreciate how, historically, many of the concerns raised by participants in cross cultural research have not been heard, or have "simply [been] passed over" (Smith, 1999, p.198) by the community to which the research has been presented. The hope I hold for my practice is that I will continue to investigate experiences of marginalisation, and join with other counsellor practitioners who are also interested to explore and contribute to this area of understanding.

### **Reciprocity and taking it back practices**

Through the research conversations I have been taken further into the lives of Mihi, Huia and Nikki. They have made aspects of their lives available for investigation with me and now available for the reader. It has been an intention of this research to give value to what the women have said and hence each woman's story has a dedicated chapter. In valuing these stories, I am "taking [the] women's experiences as central" (Burman, 1994, p. 125). In centralising each woman's experience in a chapter, I offer back the understandings I have gained and the new knowledge that has been generated (Te Wiata, 2006) between me as a pakeha counsellor / researcher and Nikki, Huia and Mihi who have participated in this research. It is important to me to be engaged in a practice which does not see knowledge as something owned or colonised by the researcher (Smith, 1999), but rather as something to be taken back to the community from which it was generated. In this way I understand the research we have undertaken is in part a de-colonising practice.

Another way in which the women's stories have taken me further in my work is by appreciating the effect sharing the ideas that inform my counselling has for the counselling relationship. For example, when Mihi spoke in the research of the ways she needed me and I needed her, I understood her to be referring to the ways in which both the counselling relationship and the research relationship became sites where different kinds of knowledge was generated between us. I understood that, at these sites, the theoretical ideas and concepts of narrative therapy became readily available for Mihi to critique. In this way the activity of counselling was made transparent for her.

[F]or we believe very strongly that to know the underlying theory is to become empowered in a way that is not possible when applications are employed in a purely mechanical manner. (Drewery & Winslade, 1997, p. 33)

Mihi's account of this experience has offered me an additional perspective on the kinds of knowledge people might find helpful in their lives. In particular, I was interested to learn of the ways in which Mihi noticed the counselling and research relationships interconnecting both our lives – "I needed you and you needed me". I think of this as demonstrating the significance of practices which give back to those who have joined the research and which also gesture to those women who did not join this research but whose stories have contributed to the development of my counselling practice (White, 1997). In this I also understood Mihi's comments as another indication of the importance of practices that give value to the knowledge shared by all the women who have consulted me for counselling.

### **The effects of dominant discursive cultural practices**

What has become visible to me throughout the process of this research is the effect pakeha cultural practices have on people who do not claim this as their only identity. The women of this study each spoke of how their identity as Maori was overlooked or not acknowledged in aspects of their lives, and if it was noticed, the noticing occurred of her negative ways. I now appreciate that when some Maori women decide to engage in counselling with me, a pakeha, they might expect to step into an

environment that shares and reflects dominant pakeha cultural practices of superiority and privilege (Raheim et al). Therefore women may enter counselling having already decided their identity as Maori is irrelevant. This expectation, I suggest, has implications for counselling. When a woman is quiet about aspects of her Maori identity she may have already experienced a counselling approach that has ignored her ethnicity. She may have experienced marginalisation as a result of her ethnicity. She may have decided she will not speak about her identity, as it risks too much. However, I am not suggesting it is the responsibility of the woman seeking assistance to draw to my attention her ethno-cultural identity, rather holding these ideas as possible explanations means I am more alert to inquire about experiences of marginalisation in a tentative way.

### **Creating the conditions for cultural identity conversations**

In this research I am not looking to know everything about counselling women whose cultural identity is different to my own, this would be taking up the essentialist position that identity can be known (Monk & Winslade, in press). Instead I am interested to learn what people themselves understand when they speak of their identities. I am curious to learn about how identity changes in response to history, to social circumstances, and to family values and traditions. In this regard the cultural conversations in which the women and I engaged did not seek to reach any predetermined understanding of a right way to go about counselling Maori women, particularly in the context of sexual abuse. Rather, the conversations sought to investigate the meaning to the women of the cultural identity conversations in which we engaged. Phillips (2007) wrote:

Solutions to multicultural dilemmas are best arrived at through discussion and dialogue, where people from different cultural backgrounds explain to one another why they favour particular laws or practice, and develop skills of negotiation and compromise that enable us to live together. (p.180)

In counselling I did not assume the women would want to talk about the effects of racism in their lives with a pakeha counsellor or that their experiences of racism would be similar. Neither did I assume that each of the women would have a singular

description of what it meant to them to engage in these kinds of conversations. Avoiding these assumptions I suggest, contributed to the conditions that made it possible for the Huia, Mihi, Nikki and me to begin to talk about experiences of marginalisation and identity.

In my counselling practice, I am interested to create the conditions into which the women can speak. Equally, I am interested in creating the conditions in which this thesis might be read and to this end I now wish to offer some further thoughts on the re-presentation of the conversations of this project. I include how this re-presentation has positioned me in relation to my practice.

### ***Re-presentation***

In considering the possible ways to represent this research, I experienced uncertainty in presenting my own voice. This uncertainty, I realised, was connected to the context of my earlier educational experiences when particular kinds of scientific process and methodology were privileged, the researcher's was voice distant and the participants objectified. While I did not wish to present this research in ways that silenced the women's contributions, made them the object of my research, or that intentionally colonised their experiences, it was another step to bring my voice closer to the body of this text; and this in spite of the ideas presented by McLeod (1999) that proposed the legitimacy of practitioner research. The hesitancy of presenting my own voice in writing this project was also connected to the ethical practice of privileging the voices of the people who consult me while at the same time decentring my own. This aspect of my work has had many years of practice. In addition, I have received gender 'training' that has valued and shaped the positioning I have given to experiences in my life and to the voicing of these experiences. While there have been many times when I have escaped the effects of this gender training, being actively encouraged and supported to voice my own understandings for any length is relatively unique. As well, more recently there have been occasions when my writing has been criticised by a peer for being idiosyncratic and not professional enough when representing the experiences of the people for whom I have written a professional report. In these

reports I have included the language of the person and have supported their wish to have their experiences documented. While I appreciate that organisations have report writing requirements and some organisations do not query objectifying language, I am not interested to join in these practices. Neither will I intentionally write in ways that disadvantage a person. An effect of undertaking this research, and especially of engaging in a project that has invited the voices of Nikki, Huia, Mihi and me to be heard, is that when writing reports for organisations, I am now better positioned to call on the body of knowledge that advocates for the inclusion of subjective and narrative accounts in research (McLeod, 1999). I am also positioned to question the essentialist thinking that requires reports to be written in ways that makes little attempt to consider the complexities and contradictions of a person's life (Monk & Winslade, in press). For example: if I understand that the diagnostic labels required by ACC when making a claim for the effects of sexual abuse are culturally produced, then I might ask how suitable such labels are for women whose identities are influenced by both Pakeha and Maori cultural traditions. I might also consider how such terminology could fit a woman's experience and ethno-cultural history. In these ways the research has invited me to position myself differently in relation to the local knowledges of the women who consult me.

“Researchers are in receipt of privileged information”. (Smith, L. 1999, p.176).

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## **Appendix A**

### **Letter of invitation to Huia**

122 Chaucer Rd  
Napier.

30 August 2007

Kia ora Huia,

As you know from our conversations recently, I am studying at Waikato University on the Master of Counselling Programme, and this year I hope to complete my course with a research project.

I have been thinking about our counselling conversations where we include culture in the things we talk about. As a pakeha counsellor I want to learn more about what is helpful or not helpful for Maori women clients who meet with me in counselling. And I would value speaking with you about your experiences of the counselling conversations we have had together.

For example, I am thinking of the conversation we had about school and how you said it “didn’t do so well” in helping your children with learning. You spoke about how you had been thinking this was mostly connected to the instability of home, until we talked about the research Russell Bishop has done with Maori students and their teachers. Huia, you then said that maybe how your children did at school wasn’t all to do with them. Maybe it was also something to do with how the school was organised for learning. This conversation has stayed with me and has given me a lot to think about. I would be interested to speak with you about any reflections you may have on this conversation or any others that may have caught your attention.

And so I am writing this letter to invite you to join me in this project.

If you are interested in participating, I enclose an information sheet which outlines in more detail what I hope we might do together.

Thank you very much for your consideration of taking part in this project.

Best wishes

Jane Harkness

## **Appendix B**

### **Letter of invitation to Mihi**

122 Chaucer Rd

Napier.

17 July 2007

Kia ora Mihi,

As you know from our conversations, I am studying at Waikato University on the Master of Counselling Programme, and this year I hope to complete my course with a research project.

I have been thinking about the counselling conversations where we include culture in things we talk about. As a pakeha counsellor I want to learn more about what is helpful or not helpful for Maori women clients who meet with me in counselling. And I would value speaking with you about your experiences of the counselling conversations we have had together. For example, the conversation we had about the effects of racism on you as young girl at school and now as an adult has stayed with me, and given me a lot to think about. I would be interested to speak with you about any reflections you may have on this conversation, and any others that you recall.

And so I am writing this letter to invite you to join me in this project. If you are interested in participating, I enclose an information sheet which outlines in more detail what I hope we might do together.

Thank you very much for your consideration of taking part in this project.

Best wishes

Jane Harkness

## **Appendix C**

### **Letter of invitation to Nikki**

122 Chaucer Rd

Napier

26 September 2007

Kia ora Nikki,

As you know from our conversations, I am studying at Waikato University on the Master of Counselling Programme; and this year I hope to complete my course with a research project.

I have been thinking about the counselling conversations where we have included culture in things we talk about. As a pakeha counsellor I want to learn more about what is helpful or not helpful for Maori women clients who meet with me in counselling. And I would value speaking with you about your experiences of the counselling conversations we have had together. For example, when Dame Te Atairangikaahu passed away, I remember you told me how you collected newspaper articles and watched TV programmes about her life and her tangihanga. We talked about what this meant to you, and what this might mean for your son in the future. This conversation has stayed with me, and has given me a lot to think about. I would be interested to speak with you about any reflections you may have on this conversation or any others you may recall. And so I am writing this letter to invite you to join me in this project. If you are interested in participating in this project, I enclose an information sheet which tells you more about what I hope we might do together. Thank you very much for the time you have taken to read this letter and for your consideration of taking part in this project.

Best wishes

Jane Harkness

## **Appendix D**

### **Information sheet about research project for Huia**

***Title: Cultural conversations in a counselling context***

#### **My area of interest**

In this research project, I am especially interested in talking with you about:

- how conversations like the one we had about the way school “didn’t do so well” in helping your children learn, got started in the counselling we have been doing together;
- what you might remember about the way we talked about this concern you held for your children’s education;
- how you think we talked about alternative explanations for your concerns, like the research by Russell Bishop;
- what might have made it possible to talk about such things,
- if you think these conversations have had an effect on how you see yourself as a Maori women
- and if you think this conversation might have had an effect on the counselling we do together

First, I need to provide you with information so that you know what you would be agreeing to, if you decided to join me in this research.

#### **How the research will happen:**

If you are interested in participating in this research, we will meet together twice.

This will be at times that suit us both and will be outside of counselling time.

The first meeting will last about 1 hour. The second meeting will be up to an hour.

## **Recording meetings**

The meetings will be recorded but before this can happen I need your informed consent. Please read the consent form included with this letter. I will transcribe the recording of our conversation and I will send you two copies of the transcript. One copy is for you to write changes and one is for you to keep.

## **The First Meeting**

In our first meeting, we will talk together about previous counselling meetings where we have touched upon areas connected to your Maori identity. For example: the hopes you held for your children to attend a particular school, following in the steps of your great grandmother; the concerns you have had about your children's learning at school; being alert to injustices in your life and the lives of your children and your grandchildren. You may remember other times when we talked about your experiences as a Maori woman and I would be really interested to hear about these also.

## **The Second Meeting**

The second meeting will be after you have received a copy of the transcript and had the chance to read it through. It is an opportunity to add, change and clarify anything from the first conversation. This meeting will be recorded. I will type the changes to the first transcript and send you a copy.

## **Your rights in the project**

If you agree to participate in this research, it is important for you to know that:

- you can decline to answer particular questions in our conversation together
- you can change your mind once the research is underway and you can withdraw without explaining.
- you may withdraw from the project up until 3 weeks after the date of the second meeting.

- I will work to ensure that the decision to withdraw will not affect the counselling or any future counselling we may do together.

## **Confidentiality**

If you agree to participate in this research:

- the conversations we tape together will be transcribed by me
- your name will be confidential to me
- you or I can choose a pseudonym by which you will be known in the writing of this project
- all the information generated in our conversation together will be kept secure
- recordings of our meetings will be erased after I have completed the transcribing

## **Where the information we talk about together, will go**

Some of our conversations will be reproduced word for word and some of the themes and findings will also be written about in the final copy of my research. All of this will be done in a way that protects your identity. We will talk about any other things I might need to do to protect your privacy in the written document. I may also use some of the ideas and findings that come from our conversations in this project, to write about or to present to other colleagues, counsellors and their clients. The final copy of the research project will be given to the University of Waikato for examination.

## **Deciding not to participate**

It is also important for you to know, you can decide not to participate in this research and I will work to ensure that your decision will not affect the counselling that we undertake together or any future counselling we may engage in together.

## **What to do next**

If you are interested in participating in the project, would you please fill in the form included with this letter and return it to me in the envelope. Or if you prefer, you can ring me or let me know when we next meet for counselling. And if you decide not to participate, you can either complete the form and return it to me, or phone me or let me know when we next meet for counselling.

Thank you.

And, if you have any questions, please ask me. I am very happy to answer them.

This research project is supervised by:

Dr Kathie Crocket

Department of Human Development and Counselling

Private Bag 3105

University of Waikato.

Phone 07 8384466

You may also contact her if that would be helpful for you or if you have any concerns about the research.



## **Appendix E**

### **Information sheet about research project for Mihi**

***Title: Cultural conversations in a counselling context***

#### **My area of interest**

In this research project, I am especially interested in talking with you about:

- how conversations like the one we had about the racism you experienced as a child and as an adult, got started in the counselling we have been doing together;
- what you might remember about the way we talked about these times in your life
- how you think we talked about the racism together
- what might have made it possible to talk about such things
- if you think these conversations have had an effect on how you see yourself as a Maori women
- and if you think this conversation might have had an effect on the counselling we do together

First, I need to provide you with information so that you know what you would be agreeing to, if you decided to join me in this research.

#### **How the research will happen**

If you are interested in participating in this research, we will meet together twice.

This will be at times that suit us both and will be outside of counselling time.

The first meeting will last about 1 hour. The second meeting will be up to an hour.

## **Recording meetings**

The meetings will be recorded but before this can happen I need your informed consent. Please read the consent form included with this letter. I will transcribe the recording of our conversation and I will send you two copies of the transcript. One copy is for you to write changes and one is for you to keep.

## **The First Meeting**

In our first meeting, we will talk together about previous counselling meetings where we have touched upon areas connected to your Maori identity. For example: your experiences of racism as a child and as an adult. You may remember other times when we talked about your experiences as a Maori woman, like just recently when you were speaking about the kohanga and church you belong to; I would be really interested to hear about these also.

## **The Second Meeting**

The second meeting will be after you have received a copy of the transcript and had the chance to read it through. It is an opportunity to add, change and clarify anything from the first conversation. This meeting will be recorded. I will type the changes to the first transcript and send you a copy.

## **Your rights in the project**

If you agree to participate in this research, it is important for you to know that:

- you can decline to answer particular questions in our conversation together
- you can change your mind once the research is underway and you can withdraw without explaining.
- you may withdraw from the project up until 3 weeks after the date of the second meeting.

- I will work to ensure that the decision to withdraw will not affect the counselling or any future counselling we may do together.

## **Confidentiality**

If you agree to participate in this research:

- the conversations we tape together will be transcribed by me
- your name will be confidential to me
- you or I can choose a pseudonym by which you will be known in the writing of this project
- all the information generated in our conversation together will be kept secure
- recordings of our meetings will be erased after I have completed the transcribing

## **Where the information we talk about together will go**

Some of our conversations will be reproduced word for word and some of the themes and findings will also be written about in the final copy of my research. All of this will be done in a way that protects your identity. We will talk about any other things I might need to do to protect your privacy in the written document.

I may also use some of the ideas and findings that come from our conversations in this project, to write about or to present to other colleagues, counsellors and their clients.

The final copy of the research project will be given to the University of Waikato for examination.

## **Deciding not to participate**

It is also important for you to know, you can decide not to participate in this research and I will work to ensure that your decision will not affect the counselling that we undertake together or any future counselling we may engage in together.

## **What to do next**

If you are interested in participating in the project, would you please fill in the form included with this letter and return it to me in the envelope. Or if you prefer, you can ring me or let me know when we next meet for counselling.

And if you decide not to participate, you can either complete the form and return it to me, or phone me or let me know when we next meet for counselling.

Thank you.

And, if you have any questions, please ask me. I am very happy to answer them.

This research project is supervised by:

Dr Kathie Crocket

Department of Human Development and Counselling

Private Bag 3105

University of Waikato.

Phone 07 8384466

You may also contact her if that would be helpful for you or if you have any concerns about the research.

## **Appendix F**

### **Information sheet about research project for Nikki**

***Title: Cultural conversations in a counselling context***

#### **My area of interest**

In this research project, I am especially interested in talking with you about:

- how conversations like the one we had about your ancestors, your son and the tangi for Dame Te Atairangikaahu got started in the counselling we have been doing together;
- what you might remember about the way we talked about these things;
- how you think we talked together about them;
- what might have made it possible to talk about your son, the tangi and your ancestors
- if you think this conversation has had an effect on how you see yourself as a Maori women
- and if you think this conversation might have had an effect on the counselling we do together

First, I need to provide you with information so that you know what you would be agreeing to, if you decided to join me in this research.

#### **How the research will happen**

If you are interested in participating in this research, we will meet together twice.

These will be at times that suit us both and will be outside of counselling time.

The first meeting will last about 1 hour. The second meeting will be up to an hour.

#### **Recording Meetings**

The meetings will be recorded but before this can happen I need your informed consent. Please read the consent form included with this letter. I will transcribe the

recording of our conversation and I will send you two copies of the transcript. One copy is for you to write changes and one is for you to keep.

## **The First Meeting**

In our first meeting, we will talk together about previous counselling meetings where we have touched upon areas connected to your Maori identity. For example, like talking about your ancestors, your son and the tangi for Dame Te Atairangikaahu. You may remember other times we talked about your experiences as a Maori woman; I would be really interested to hear about these also.

## **The Second Meeting**

The second meeting will be after you have received a copy of the transcript and had the chance to read it through. It is an opportunity to add, change and clarify anything from the first conversation. This meeting will be recorded. I will type the changes to the transcript and send you a copy.

## **Your rights in the project**

If you agree to participate in this research, it is important for you to know that:

- you can decline to answer particular questions in our conversation together
- you can change your mind once the research project is underway and you can withdraw without explaining.
- you may withdraw from the project up until 3 weeks after the date of the second meeting.
- I will work to ensure that the decision to withdraw will not affect the counselling or any future counselling we may do together.

## **Confidentiality**

If you agree to participate in this research:

- the conversations we tape together will be transcribed by me
- your name will be confidential to me

- you or I can choose a pseudonym by which you will be known in the writing of this project
- all the information generated in our conversation together will be kept secure
- recordings of our meetings will be erased after I have completed the transcribing

### **Where the information we talk about together will go**

Some of our conversations will be reproduced word for word and some of the themes and findings will also be written about in the final copy of my research. All of this will be done in a way that protects your identity. We will talk about any other things I might need to do to protect your privacy in the written document.

I may also use some of the ideas and findings that come from our conversations in this project, to write about or to present to other colleagues, counsellors and their clients. The final copy of the research project will be given to the University of Waikato for examination.

### **Deciding not to participate**

It is also important for you to know, you can decide not to participate in this research and I will work to ensure that your decision will not affect the counselling that we undertake together or any future counselling we may engage in together.

### **What to do next**

If you are interested in participating in the project, would you please fill in the form included with this letter and return it to me in the envelope. Or if you want, you can ring me or let me know when we meet for counselling. And if you decide not to participate, you can either complete the form and return it to me, or phone me or let me know when we meet for counselling.

Thank you.

And, if you have any questions, please ask me. I am very happy to answer them.

This research project is supervised by:

Dr Kathie Crocket

Department of Human Development and Counselling

Private Bag 3105

University of Waikato.

Phone 07 8384466

You may also contact her if that would be helpful for you or if you have any concerns about the research.



## Appendix G

### Expressions of interest in research project.

***Title: Cultural conversations in a counselling context***

Once you have had time to think about the project, please use the tick boxes to tell me if you are interested or not, in participating in this research project and return it in the postage paid envelope. Alternatively you can ring me at the number below, or let me know when we meet next for counselling.

Thank you.

Please tick:

I have read the letter, the information sheet and the consent form and

I am interested in participating in the research project

I do not wish to participate in this project

I would like to ask you more about the project before I decide.

Name: .....

Date: .....

## **Appendix H**

### **Consent form**

#### ***Title: Cultural conversations in a counselling context***

I have read the information sheet and I understand that I will participate in:-

- a) approximately a one hour conversation with Jane
- b) a reading of my transcript and making any changes or additions
- c) a second conversation with Jane to talk about and write the changes I wish to make to the transcript

I understand the conversation will be connected to aspects of the counselling when we have talked about my cultural identity.

I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered.

I understand that I may withdraw from the project at anytime, without explanation, up to 3 weeks (21 days) following the date of the second meeting.

I understand the conversations will be taped.

I understand that Jane will use the ideas that come from our conversations in her research project, and that she may also write about or present this research to offer its findings to other counsellors and their clients.

I have received adequate information to make an informed decision about participating in this research project and I agree to take part in this research project.

Signed: .....

Name: .....

Date: .....

## Appendix I

### Withdrawal form

***Title: Cultural conversations in a counselling context***

If you decide to withdraw from the research project, and don't want to speak to me directly, you can use the tick boxes below.

If you wish to end the counselling we are doing together, you can let me know this too.

Please then return the form to me in the postage paid envelope.

Alternatively, you can ring me at the number below.

Please tick:

I no longer wish to participate in this research project

I would like to talk to you about areas of the research project I have participated in so far before going any further.

I no longer wish to have counselling with you

I would like you to provide me with names and contacts of suitable counsellors.

Name: .....

Date: .....